Entertainment / A13
CNN'S Veronica Pedrosa one of 100 sexiest?

Infotech
Blackberry 7230: E-mail in pocket

World
Mystery donor drops gold coins into Salvation Army pot

Lifestyle / C7
Artists go natural

Training ng Bagani / A24
Paslo sa taghirap, dapat pa bang magpasarap?

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Not so festive Christmas for local decor makers

CHRISTUS, gaily colored Christmas decorations from the Philippines adorn the shop windows of Harrods in New York and Harrods in London...but at home, the makers of such products are not in festive mood.

The country's once-booming Christmas decorations industry finds itself increasingly under siege from China and other countries.

PNP says streets have become safer

By Christen Esguerra

'Politics-free FPJ funeral'

Balloons, butterflies to grace KC burial

By Margaux C. Ortiz and Nancy C. Carvajal

WEEK Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. arrived with his wife Gina at the Santuario de San Antonio in Forbes Park, he was carrying the urn that contained the ashes of their daughter the Kristine Camille or "KC."

According to Gina's sister, Marichu Maceda, the heartbroken couple take the urn with them every night after the prayer vigil.

"We wanted the urn with him all the time. He brings it back here (Santuario) for the Mass and the vigil," Maceda said.

KC, the De Venecias' youngest daughter, died early Friday morning in a fire which destroyed their Quantico Blue Village home. She was only 16.

Cecile Sarton, De Venecia's daughter from a previous marriage, said the Speaker would bring the urn in his room at the Quezon House "to say goodbye."

Sarton remembers "how light and joyous KC was" and "how interested she was in the world ... She was a lovely girl.... Too heart-breaking," she said.

Maceda, an avid supporter of Fernando Poe Jr. and a close friend of Susan Roces, also re-

IT MAY BE a time for mourning but for this street barker outside Sto. Domingo Church it is also a time to do brisk business selling t-shirts stamped with the initials of the late Fernando Poe Jr. FPJ is to be buried Wednesday at the North Cemetery.

Massive turnout at wake a warning to elite

By Armando Doronila

THE LOADS of fernando Poe Jr. is being blown up into a grotesque caricature that distorts the impact of his demise on this political life of this country.

One's contribution to his socio-economic status and to the life in death is beyond dispute. His claim to fame soars beyond the values norms when he morphed from an actor into a politician, his fatal the audacity to storm on less than the commanding heights of Philippine politics—the presidency. Where he succumbed to a fatal stroke, he was a failed politician.

If he had died without having stood for president, there would be no doubt that tens of thousands of his movie fans and admirers would have deeply mourned his passing.

The multitudes that have filled past his body during the wake of the past few days are grieving that they have lost an alter ego, a person without manifold movie roles immersed the aspirations of the disadvantaged. His spirit stands for justice and a better life.

The most accurate tribute ever paid to Poe was that which described him as the icon of the unfulfilled aspirations of the frustrated underdog who had identified with him in his film roles that depicted the struggle between suffering obscurity and corrupt authority and oppression, and coming to the rescue of the weak.

Poe was the lightning rod of these aspirations that have for many generations been looking

ANALYSIS

Susan Roces appeals to supporters of 'Da King'

By Edson Tandoc jr., Lugod A. del Puerto and Ed Zamora

A SOLEMN funeral fit for a man loved by the people.

This was the appeal aired yesterday by Fernando Poe Jr.'s widow, movie actress Susan Roces, as she and her family stepped up preparations for what is expected to be a blockbuster of a funeral at the North Cemetery on Wednesday.

"Walang pulitika (No politics)," Roces said, when asked what her marching orders were to FPJ's supporters. "That's to-everybody-and everyone-agrees."

"We are safeguarding that this does not happen," she added, referring to an opposition senator's warning that the huge throng expected to attend the funeral may get out of control and cause national night are the occasion to destabilize the government.

The widow spoke to reporters in a lobby of the Sto. Domingo Church where FPJ's remains lie in state since Saturday night, a moment of their ordinary people and many carrying cameras to take pictures of the dead movie king, plied past the gleaming coffin.

In a dark suit with a light blue tie, FPJ lay in a mauve coffin amid white blossoms.

"Our supporters are helping us to make sure that (the funeral) will not be tarnished by politics," Roces said.

Queried about a statement by opposition leader Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. that political opportunists might use the funeral for political ends, Roces said: "I do not relate, I do not hear and I do not think that will happen. All some have to pay their respects for my husband. It is enough that they can't even get a glimpse of him."

FPJ's younger brother, Conrad, rejected the idea that some people would turn the funeral march into a political forum. FPJ himself would not want to take advantage of other people and he would not want other people to take advantage of him, Conrad said.

"Let us put a stop to this (politics), even for just a while," Conrad said, adding that his brother did not condone violence. "Let us hear him peacefully to his resting place. Let us not wreck the occasion.... Let us keep to ourselves whatever we feel inside that could erupt," he said.

A SPECTACULAR show of lights at the Lagligan Pond in the City of San Fernando, on Saturday

Lanterns prove RP can achieve synergy

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Nine giant lanterns, the modern version of the Star of Bethlehem, dazzled some 50,000 local and foreign spectators at the 4th anniversary of Ol City Pampanga here on Saturday night.

The lanterns—each 5.65 meters in diameter and fitted with 4,000 to 6,000 light bulbs—were the "stars" in this year's Lagligan Parol (Giant Lantern Festival).

Seven on trucks, displayed in a row and accompanied by the images of the villages' patron saints, the lanterns put on a spectacular display under skies illuminated by a full moon and a handful of stars.

Sen. Manuel Roxas II, the festival's guest, said the lanterns signified the Filipino's ability to rise above hard times, seeing the tragedies that had befallen the country this year.

Roxas also likened the lanterns to Filipinos. They come from diverse backgrounds, but when they unite, they can work to push the country forward and into progress. They are like lanterns, where elements—evil, shame, mirrored, light source—work together in a synchronized manner.

Cebuano nurse makes it big in Nevada

By Connie E. Fernandez
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—He used to rummage through the neighborhood trash for whatever could be sold to the tourists' "pinkupan" (junk shop) to augment his school allowance. But he does not have to do that now.

He has come a long way—from an underprivileged community here to the glittering world of Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, where he was recently named "Nurse of the Year."

Abigail Tan, 26, the only child of a retired schoolteacher and retired policeman, did not expect to win. His mind went blank when his name was called during the awarding ceremonies on Nov. 15 at the grand ballroom of the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

Although he did not prepare a speech, Tan did not forget the promise he made to himself to one day win. He closed his eyes, rose to the crowd of 700 that included state officials and medical practitioners with "Thank you ... maraming salamat ... daghang salamat."

In an e-mail to the inquirer, Tan said he did this "so people would know where I came from or at least would wonder what I said, and would end up asking."

Tan grew up in Barangay Duljo-Fatima, which he described as "a total picture of what poverty is all about." He recalled that although both his parents were working, money was scarce and hardships was on the "everyday menu."

He would do his share to help his parents. In the summer, Tan would sell "binanayan" and boiled eggs in the neighborhood. To earn additional money, he would scavenge the trash for tin cans, empty bottles and wrought iron.

He enjoyed doing these because his mother had once told him that there was nothing shameful about earning an honest living.

Tan said he had found his calling while raising sows of pigs, which his mother raised to help pay the bills

RAISED. Tan, flanked by his father Rogelio and mother Yolanda, shows off his award as "Nurse of the Year" in the advance practice category.

GMA stands by her men, women

ARROYO

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo will stand by Jim Calderon and other government appointees who fail to make it past the Commission on Appointments.

"The President will support them once they are bypassed," said Communications Director Silvestre Afable in an interview yesterday.

Afable also reiterated the Presidency's continued confidence in her appointees who had been bypassed by the CA, such as Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes and Elections Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said Saturday Reyes and the CA was instrumental in having their nominations rejected.

But Afable said the bypassed appointees continued to have Ms Arroyo's support, particularly Reyes who was recently named to head the revived National Anti-Smuggling Task Force as well.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, who received the CAs seat last week, said the President was satisfied with the performances of her appointees. He said lack of time more than lack of qualifications was the main reason some appointees were bypassed by the CA.

Cam Ellaces should quit their posts and let the President name their replacements since being bypassed by

MVC, Cathcartquen Jr.

Reds thumb down ceasefire, peace talks with gov't

By Tj Burgonio and Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon Bureau

THE RESUMPTION of formal peace talks between the government and communist rebels is now unlikely after the latter accused the government of seeking their "capitulation" as a precondition.

At the same time, the communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines rejected the unilateral ceasefire declared by the government, branding it as "a ploy to peace."

Fidel Agcaoili, chair of the NDF committee on human rights, said the group "deemed" the resumption of formal peace talks with the government.

"But the prospects for such resumption under the Arroyo regime are dim," Agcaoili said in a statement, citing the government's refusal "to inquire in a precondition the capitulation of the NDF under the guise of an indefinite ceasefire," among other things.

This, he said, violated The Hague Joint Declaration.

Tricky purpose

"The NDF considers as tricky purpose the so-called unilateral ceasefire issued by the GRP by Dir Christmas and New Year holidays and is calling on the people and the revolutionary forces to be vigilant against the treacherous acts of the military police, paramilitary and private armed groups of the regime," Agcaoili said.

The government had vowed hopes the unilateral ceasefire it had declared with the New People's Army would lead to a permanent ceasefire.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said the government would welcome a reciprocal action from the rebels, but "it would be more fruitful if both the government and the CPP/NPA can come up with a lasting ceasefire."

President Macapagal-Arroyo declared a ceasefire with the rebels from Dec. 15 to Jan. 5, replicating what has become a tradition during the Christmas season.

Agcaoili, who co-chairs the NDF-government joint monitoring committee, also cited other reasons for the gloomy prospects for the peace talks.

US collaboration

These include the government's collaboration with the US "in using the so-called terror on hiring" in Mindanao for NDF and rebel organizations; the huge role played by the US in crafting the administration's policy on peace negotiations, and the impending ouster of the Arroyo administration by an enlarged people.

He also accused the US and the GRP of threatening to assassinate Europe-based panelists and consultants of the NDF, especially NDF chief political consultant Prof. Jose Maria Sison.

"They are trying to kill the CPP/NDF peace negotiations completely in order to make way for the escalation of US military intervention and for the increased US stranglehold on the Philippine economy," he said.

Rebs surprised

Silvestre Afable, the government's chief negotiator, was taken aback by reports that the NPA rebels had ceased down the government's opposition to Christmas ceasefire.

"We're surprised. I just talked to Fidel Agcaoili and he said they were studying no ceasefire," Afable said.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the government would not relax back its offer of a Christmas ceasefire although the military and police have been ordered to go on full alert.

The communist rebels called off peace talks with the government in August, accusing Malacañang of not doing enough to persuade international governments to remove from their list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Agcaoili described the terrorist listing as a violation of The Hague Joint Declaration, the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, which were signed by the NDF and the Philippine government.

Christmas tradition

In an earlier interview, communist spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal said the communist insurgents were also inclined to declare their own ceasefire as part of the Christmas tradition but only to certain extent.

"But we will only do so after a thorough assessment of the party's highest organs and not because that's what the AFP insisted on to do," Rosal said in an interview.

Rosal was reacting to Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Efren Abu's statement on Thursday that the military would recommend the cancellation of the Yuletide truce declared by President Macapagal-Arroyo if it continues with hostile actions.

Rosal scoffed at the military saying, "Our fired fighters are not obliged to obey government declared ceasefire."

"The NPA will continue to stand on full alert if there's an opening because they don't have any order not to end their guns," he said. *With a report from MVC, Cathcartquen Jr.*

₱1.6B set for homes for typhoon victims

By Christine V. Esguerra and Doris J. Pacalioga

MALACAÑANG has earmarked at least ₱1.6 billion for the construction and repair of at least 170,000 houses damaged by four recent typhoons, the National Disaster Coordinating Council announced yesterday.

At least 7,12,981 families stand to be provided with new homes through the "core housing" program being prepared by the NDCC and the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman earlier announced that ₱50,000 would be given to each family whose house was destroyed by the recent storms.

The new houses will be built in areas to be selected by the administration as core housing communities.

He say there are nine proposed resettlement sites, four in Compostela Valley and five in Real, both in Quezon.

Selected areas will be screened based on the damage caused by the recent typhoons, civil integrity, availability of death rates and forest cover, land ownership, production of water and road networks, and the presence of fault lines.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology will determine if the sites areas are fit for housing, considering the presence of the Philippine fault line.

'That's it for bonuses'

THE DEPARTMENT of Budget and Management yesterday told government employees not to expect any more bonuses this month because it had no money to play Santa Claus this Christmas.

"Since we gave out the bonuses very early this year, we have been getting a lot of questions if there was any more coming. We said down clear right now, we don't have that," said Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin in an interview over DZRH radio.

Boncodin pointed out that the duly mandated 13th-month pay and Christmas cash gift for workers had been distributed in two tranches—the first was given in May shortly before the elections and the second was handed out last month.

The government spent close to ₱50 billion for the bonuses of the 1.1 million employees of national government agencies this year.

Boncodin said the government was in an "austerity phase" as it grapples with a fiscal crisis that could worsen into a full-blown economic crisis if it did not resolve pesos and trade revenues. Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

Shell rules out price rollback

OIL REFINER Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. has ruled out a rollback in oil prices at this time, citing the difficult market environment in 2004 which resulted in some ₱5 billion in foreign exchange losses for the company.

Instead of a rollback, Shell will raise the discounts it is giving to public transport cuts as payment and lower by another 25 centavos per liter effective last yesterday and another 25 centavos on Christmas day.

Petron Corp. and Caltex Philippines Inc. are likewise increasing their diesel discounts.

On Dec. 15, Petron and Caltex will raise the discounts to ₱1 centavos from the current 50 centavos a liter. By Dec. 17, the discount will be increased to ₱1 a liter.

Shell general manager for external affairs Roberto Kintanar said Consumer and Oil Price Watch's claim that a rollback was in order at this time was unfounded.

Kintanar said COPW chair Raul Concepcion's figures were the result of "poor guesswork" and were based on "misinformed assumptions and dubious information."

He said that Shell's estimates were supported by "accurate, appropriate and legally derived data," as opposed to Concepcion's "rush of the moment calculations." Miguel L. Lo

Japan open to talks on new policy

By TJ Burgonio

JAPAN is still open to a dialogue with the Philippine government regarding its new immigration policy on Filipino performing artists, which has caused a furor among talents and their managers in Manila, officials said yesterday.

The new immigration policy, which junks a Philippine government's certification of an artist's qualifications in favor of a two-year training or experience in a specific field of entertainment, is set to be enforced beginning Jan. 1, 2006.

The Philippines has proposed a five-year moratorium on the implementation of the new policy while it serves as bilaterally on the number of Filipino entertainers going to Japan from 80,000 to 8,000 every year. The proposal was submitted to the Japanese government by Philippine Ambassador to Japan Domingo Siazon.

"They haven't made a decision yet but are [open]. They're still open to a dialogue. That's the message I'm getting from Siazon," Foreign Undersecretary Jose Brillantes said in an interview.

Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said Friday that he was meeting Brillantes in Japanese Embassy on a possible moratorium or the adoption of a transition period before the new regulation is implemented.

Resignation sought

Romulo's announcement came hours after hundreds of entertainers and their managers picketed the Department of Foreign Affairs, demanding a moratorium on the new rule and the ouster of Romulo and Brillantes for allegedly failing to act swiftly on the issue.

Earlier, they staged similar protest rallies at the Japanese Embassy and the labor Department.

The entertainers and their managers have threatened to reinforce their protest rallies in the coming weeks unless the Japanese government meets positively on their demands.

"If possible, the protest rallies will continue until the Japanese government responds to the proposal," said Bernie Salinel, spokesperson of the 3,000-strong Philippine-Overseas Entertainment Industry Foundation.

"There should be a five-year moratorium. For the interim, the talents carrying APAs (artist-record books) should be allowed to work until they get the necessary training or experience required by the new policy," he said.

For years, Filipinos had been allowed to work as entertainers in bars and nightclubs in Japan just by presenting the ADR, a government document certifying that the holder had undergone the necessary training and testing for their dancing and singing skills.

Under the new policy, the ADR will no longer be recognized. Instead, the talents will be required to present proof of a two-year training in music or dance, or two years of experience as a singer or dancer outside Japan.

Human trafficking

The Japanese government adopted the policy on Dec. 7 after it was criticized by the US State Department for its failure to check the human trafficking in foreigners, including Filipino women who end up as commercial sex workers.

A Department of Labor and Employment official yesterday told the Japanese government that prospective, not registered artists, is the better option to combat human trafficking.

Undersecretary Manuel Imson, acting DOLE chief, said Tokyo's new immigration policy "underscores the area of suspension [and] puts safety on the shoulders of the host country the burden of stopping the victimization of trafficking."

With a report from Aurora Antiporda

DADDY IS A PEACEKEEPER
Daddy's little girl refuses to let him go, but go he must (in Haiti) as part of the 113-strong Philippine peacekeeping contingent to that strife-wracked country under the aegis of the United Nations. The Filipino troops left from Villamor Air Base yesterday and will be away for six months. AFP/File

Missing Pinoy seaman given up for dead

By TJ Burgonio

THE SIX missing crewmen, including a 60-year-old Malaysian cargo vessel that sank in icy Alaskan waters amid stormy weather on Dec. 8 have "presumed dead" by the US Coast Guard, foreign affairs officials said.

The seamen, including Filipino Carlos Jarriago, were missing after the helicopter that plucked them from the sinking M/V Intrepidus Ayu crashed in the freezing waters. Eleven other Filipinos were rescued and brought to safety.

A search team from the US Coast Guard had been scouring the waters for any sign of the missing crew but on Sat had some up saying he found the effort in vain.

Capt. Morrison Hastie, overall coordinator of the US Coast Guard search and rescue team, confirmed the team had not found "any of the bodies," Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Gilbert Asuque said.

Survivors arrive in RP

"Under the circumstances, Captain Hastie said the US Coast Guard considers these missing but presumed dead since there is very little chance for them to survive in the freezing waters," Asuque said in a statement.

The 11 Filipino survivors who were flown to San Francisco from Adak after the sinking arrived in Manila on Friday to be "reunited with their families" during the holiday season, the officials said.

Dante Manotilla, Wilfredo Abrenio, Jil Briones, Ronny Villanueva, Allan Tumaliuan, Jerome Nicja, Leo Alimbo, Francis Allan, Richard Bacal, Russel Lust and Juan Francisco Agustin Pigkos to Manila, they said.

The 12 Filipino seamen were part of the 26-man crew of the ship. The other missing crewmen were Indians.

The 713-foot cargo vessel, registered in Malaysia and owned by IMC Hai Bulat Marines (Pte) Ltd of Singapore, ran aground off the Aleutian islands apparently due to the stormy weather. At the time, it was carrying a cargo of grains.

Ship split in two

Shortly after, rescue teams from the US Coast Guard arrived to pick up the distressed seamen. The ship later split in two and sank in the Alaskan seas.

The ship's owner has assured Philippine officials that the marriage and the 11 Filipino survivors would receive all benefits due them.

No place for tobacco ads, backers at Games

By Nicolas S. Rivera

ATHLETES sponsored by tobacco companies or who endorse tobacco products would be disqualified from the forthcoming Asian Games to be held in the Philippines next year.

Dr. Susanna Lagsa, president of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance-Philippines (FCAP), said all 14 participating countries must agree to ban tobacco sponsorships and endorsements as part of their commitment to observe free SEA games.

FCAP, along with members of Network Free SEA Games, presented the anti-tobacco guidelines to representatives of the Federation Council of SEA Games in Makati in October.

The guidelines also violate the tobacco-free SEA Games policy, in which sporting events endorsing tobacco companies, would be disqualified from their sport or event, Lagsa said.

"These rules are caught on tobacco [endorsements of sponsors] object will be automatically disqualified," she added.

Some 9,000 athletes, 4,000 technical officials and 5,000 delegates members are expected to participate in the games.

Lagsa and representatives of sports associations of all the countries welcomed the tobacco-free games next year and did not raise objections to any of the guidelines during the meeting in October.

"Everybody knows that when you're into sports, you have to lead a healthy life. They believe in the principles we presented and we're happy about that," Lagsa said.

"But, they're worried about the implementation of rules and regulations," she said.

Lagsa said organizers of the games would designate smoking areas in the sports venues, making sure smokers will not interfere with or disturb athletes in the sporting games.

Last month, Lagsa proposed submitted to the Committee of Health in June. The Philippine Sports Commission said it would push for "zero sponsorship and fundraising at the SEA Games with the tobacco industry" for any possible loss."

The aim in the second time that a host country is working to keep the event tobacco-free. The first was in Thailand during last year's games.

Gov't mulls appeal of SC order on Journal group

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

THE PRESIDENTIAL Commission on Good Government is considering appealing the Supreme Court's order to the government to return Philippine Journalism Inc. to its former owners.

The Supreme Court on June last ordered the return in a resolution dated Dec. 14 but said the owners, led by former majority stockholder Antonio Oposa, must first settle US$ 1,203,364,889.19 debt to the state's asset Privatization Trust.

PJI, which publishes People's Journal, People's Tonight, Inc., Abante's Inquirer, Journal and Taliba, was sequestered by the government in 1986.

The government alleged that it was part of the ill-gotten wealth of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos' brother-in-law Benjamin "Kokoy" Romualdez.

"We're studying the Supreme Court's decision. If we find that it contravenes the opinion rendered by the Commission on Audit, we might file an appeal," said PCGG Chairman Camilo Sabio in an interview.

Del Rosario said the law provides that public debts amounting to P50 million and above could only be sanctioned by Congress.

The PCGG is looking to see if the SC's decision was in effect a condonation of a debt which requires Congress' approval.

"We're still studying the Supreme Court's decision," Del Rosario reiterated.

The COA said the high court that PJI's loan stood at P61,626,500.62.

But the SC upheld the PJI owners' argument that the balance of its industrial loan was only P34,984,75.

The SC, however, said the COA was correct in computing PJI's solar four obligations at P61,050,504.46.

The principles set governing and war're happy about that," Limpin said.

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Distributed by NewspaperDirect

Sin goes home

RETIRED Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin finally got his wish yesterday when he was released from the Cardinal Santos Medical Center in San Juan at around 11 a.m.

The cardinal, who was hospitalized for a low-grade fever, was initially confined in the intensive care unit but was transferred to a regular room after three days.

"He spent a week in confinement and every day of that week he wanted to go home. The doctors finally cleared him. He's okay, he has no more fever," said Archdiocese of Manila information officer Peachy Yamsuan over the phone yesterday.

Sin, who is wheelchair-bound, has a kidney ailment and undergoes dialysis thrice a week at his Villa San Miguel home in Mandaluyong City where he has 24-hour nursing care.

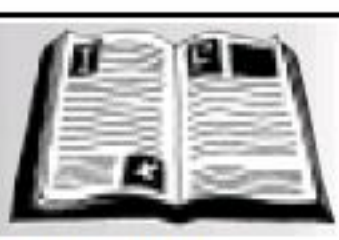
Last October, he was rushed to the Cardinal Santos Medical Center for congestive heart failure. He spent 26 days in the hospital after the doctors noticed a sudden drop in his blood pressure while undergoing dialysis at his residence.

He also suffered a stroke in March last year and was confined at the same hospital

Sin rose to worldwide fame after instigating two bloodless people power revolts that toppled two Philippine presidents in 1986 and 2001.

He retired as Manila's longest-serving archbishop—29 years—when he turned 75 in August last year. He was replaced by former Lipa Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales. *Blanche S. Rivera*

THE DAILY GOSPEL



Monday, December 20, 2004
4th Week of Advent

1st Reading: **Is 7:10-14**
Gospel: **Lk 1:26-38**

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth. He was sent to a young virgin who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the family of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

The angel came to her and said, "Rejoice full of grace, the Lord is with you." Mary was troubled at these words, wondering what this greeting could mean.

But the angel said, "Do not fear, Mary, for God has looked kindly on you. You shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call him Jesus. He will be great and shall rightly be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the kingdom of David, his ancestor; he will rule over the people of Jacob forever and his reign shall have no end.

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be if I am a virgin?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the holy child to be born shall be called Son of God. Even your relative Elizabeth is expecting a son in her old age, although she was unable to have a child, and she is now in her sixth month. With God nothing is impossible."

Then Mary said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Commentary

Meister Eckhart had a great gift of removing names and labels from familiar things and allowing them to be mysterious again. Let's hear something from him on this familiar reading.

"If anyone were to ask me, Why do we pray, why do we fast, why do we do all our works, why are we baptized, why (most important of all) did God become incarnate?—I would answer, in order that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God. For that reason all the scriptures were written, for that reason God created the world and all angelic natures: so that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God…

'The angel was called Gabriel'… He was no more called Gabriel than Conrad… 'Carpenter' is not a man's name, but his name is taken from the work of which he is a master. The angel took the name 'Gabriel' from the work of which he was a messenger, for 'Gabriel' means 'power of God'… No one can know an angel's name. No master and no understanding ever got to where an angel received his name: perhaps he is nameless…

The soul, too, has no name. Just as no one can find a true name for God, so none can find the soul's true name, although mighty tomes have been written about this. But she is given a name according as she has a regard to her activity.

In this birth God works powerfully or exerts power… In God there is plenitude of power, therefore in his birth he produces his like. All that God is in power, truth and wisdom, he bears altogether in the soul."

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'Politics-free FPJ funeral'

From page A1

He added: "Let's wait until the funeral is over."

One million marchers?

The Philippine National Police has prepared at least 1,000 officers to keep the peace from the time that Poe's body is moved out of Sto. Domingo until he is buried in the family plot in the Manila Cemetery.

"It will be our biggest preparation for a burial since that of Ninoy Aquino," said Senior Supt. Vicente Ballesteros Jr., Task Force FPJ chief, referring to the funeral march for the assassinated opposition senator which was attended by an estimated two million people.

"We're preparing for one million people, are vast hordes there," Ballesteros said.

Poe's dear friend, deposed President Joseph Estrada, may speak during the neurological rites for his buddy on Dec. 31 at Sto. Domingo Church.

"He will most likely be asked to speak," former Int. Minister Ronaldo Puno said yesterday. "People respect Estrada; he is my something about FPJ."

Estrada, on trial for plunder, has received a 24-hour pass from the Sandiganbayan which would allow him to be at FPJ's wake from 9 a.m. on Tuesday to 9 a.m. Wednesday, the day of the burial, a senior police source said.

Wedding and funeral?

Sotto said the family was finishing burial details, especially since there was a wedding set for 9 a.m. at Sto. Domingo Church on the day of the funeral. This meant Poe's remains would have to be moved out before the wedding, he said.

But he said Poe's friends had requested that the scheduled wedding be delayed a few hours so that the final Mass at the church would be held at 9 a.m.

At press time, Sotto did not know if the request had been granted.

In any case, Sotto said he had suggested that the final Mass at the church be held at 7 a.m. of Dec. 22, the same time the traditional Mass in Quiboloy is held.

Pulled by horses

He said this would allow Poe's family friends and supporters to leave the church at 9:30 a.m. and start the funeral march thereafter.

So far, Sotto said he had learned that Senate Pres. Franklin Drilon has agreed to his suggestion for the funeral march to make a stop at the sprawling FPJ Studio, which Poe acquired in the '70s.

Family friend Atanacio Mercado earlier said the burial would take place before noon, in line with a family tradition.

Poe's coffin will be mounted on a carriage pulled by horses, Sotto said.

By the family's and their friends' estimate, around one million more were may have already filed past Poe's remains as of last night, according to actor Eric Quiazon. It was not clear how they arrived at the figure.

Palace defers honors

Rebuffed earlier by the Poe family, Malacañang has decided to defer all plans to honor President Macapagal-Arroyo's close friend in the late election until after his funeral.

"All these, any discussions or moves in that direction, are held in abeyance until after the burial," Communications Director Ignacio Ablan said.

Malacañang and other officials earlier considered honoring Poe by conferring on him the Presidential Order of Merit and the National Artist Award, keeping him at the Libingan ng mga Bayani, or lowering the flag at half-staff.

The family scoffed at the offers and questioned the motives of Malacañang after Poe was allegedly shunned out of the presidency.

Military groups that Malacañang once branded as rigid fronts for the Communist Party of the Philippines appeared to have faced better. They were allowed by the Poe family to hold a Mass for "Da King" at the Sto. Domingo Church.

 Singing Ayesaang Makabayan spokesperson Bayani Reyes Jr. said Bayan and the other progressive groups had coordinated with the family through the actor's longtime friend and opposition senator Sotto.

Tagle released the following schedule of services during the wake:

- Dec. 17: 5 p.m.—Mass sponsored by People's Congress for Authentic Democracy
- Dec. 20: 4 p.m.—Mass
- 5:8 p.m.—Glory prayers service, Amos to Lord Movement, to be officiated by Bro. Eddie Villanueva
- 11 p.m.—Tribute of celebrity groups of FPJ during the movie career
- Dec. 21: 4 p.m.—Mass sponsored by the film industry
- Midnight—Public viewing ends. Occasion is reserved for family and friends.

Security measures

As of yesterday, the PNP was mapping out plans without specific requests coming from the Poe family.

General Roa said the family still had to iron out arrangements for things like portable toilets and medical units.

"We want everything to be organized," he said. "He should understand that we never expected FPJ to pass away so we were all caught by surprise," PNP reports from Christine Y. Esguerra, Christine O. Avendaño and Norman Bordadora

SUPPORTERS of Fernando Poe Jr. brave the heat as they line up outside the Sto. Domingo Church for a chance to view his remains. ALEX BARIA

Wreaths fit for 'Da King'

By Lugay A. del Puerro

EVEN the flowers would humble Da King.

As of yesterday, the family of the late Fernando Poe Jr. had received more than 150 funeral wreaths, including some from the most illustrious families and individuals in the country.

Even the average, multi-wreath size started P6,000, while others fetched as much as P8,000, if not more, an expert in the flowers industry said.

It all the flowers were ranked in, they would amount to a total of at least P600,000—enough to buy 600 sweaters of rice or build 12 houses for P50,000 each under a project of Gawad Kalinga, a Catholic organization.

Most of the wreaths arrived during the first two days of Poe's wake at the Sto. Domingo Church.

Two of the wreaths were got near Poe's coffin. Sent by President Macapagal-Arroyo and House Speaker Jose de Venecia, they were seen to dismay and scorched by disliked Poe supporters.

"Some of those flowers are very expensive," said Jing Miranda, operations manager of Hidden Gardens.

Each stem of a bunch/arrangement or branch/no-one, for one, costs anywhere between P300 to P900—and a wreath from a single person had at least 30 of them.

The flowers were mostly orchids, lilyona, anthuriums, Malaysian roses and roses.

Some of the wreaths are even eclectically tall, a few others as high as 10 feet. Others are as wide as an open space.

The wreath from Bro's buddy deposed President Joseph Estrada, stood at least 15 feet. Made mostly of orchids, it towered beside the gate to the church where the mourners enter.

The wreaths have no two colonies and pride movement as they are St. Martin's Chapel.

An amused mourner, upon seeing the flowers, could not help but remark how numerous and beautiful they were.

"They are truly fit for a king!" she said.

Massive turnout at wake a warning to elite

From page A1

for a live champion and found sustenance in the fiction of film rather in political reality.

Blend of fact and fiction

The search of the masses, toiling in penurious to poverty and unequal opportunities, had found expression in charismatic matinee-idolized leaders, such as those that occasionally emerged in the Philippine fiction. Magsaysay, Joseph Estrada, and now Poe.

In these persons, the "revolt of the masses" against the Philippine political elite, from whom the made has been recruited, the political leadership since the Philippine Revolution of 1898, found a vehicle.

Film was a convenient medium because it provided the fulfillment of the unrelieved desire since through the merger of reality with fantasy.

Message to the elite

The melodramas also throng the wake for Poe represent the powerful vociferous driven by these unfulfilled aspirations for justice, by an honest government, and for a life freed from the blight of poverty.

These aspirations found expression in the electoral vote for Poe, who has the presidential election by more than one million votes.

The mass of people denouncing their grief for him and the vote he received in May are sending a powerful message to the elite leadership that can't be ignored.

The passing of Poe does not end the masses' quest for a political leadership that can fulfill their aspirations. The masses will continue to find vehicles that can promote these aspirations. Fortunately for us, these aspirations have not been captured by the military coup plotters.

Military demagogues

The military has been identified by the masses with the elite political establishment, so has corrupt and abusive than the civilian political class.

That, in the search for champions, the masses have sought refuge in films and actors, who spoke their aspirations and language.

It would have be more dangerous consequences if these aspirations would be seized by military demagogues who could speak populist rhetoric.

It is so much the talk to compare the vessels that mourned the death of Benigno Aquino Jr. and those that mourn Poe. Caveat comparisons of these two events are inappropriate. Aquino was murdered by the Marcos political establishment. Poe died of a natural cause—without human intervention.

Difference between 2 deaths

The mourning for Aquino and the massive outpouring for his assassination—the explosion of anger that had built up over a period of 10 years over the abuses of the Marcos dictatorship.

This pent-up rage was the one on the Ayala monument marked the beginning of the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship.

In the case of Poe, his defeat in the election had nothing to do with his exodus. To try to blame it on the flawed election is to downplay the case of looking for someone to blame for his death.

The vendor came while the Presidential Electoral Tribunal was in the process of burning Poe's electoral protest.

While it is true that the election results came under a cloud of allegations of cheating, there is absolutely no justification for anyone to use Poe's death to stoke the resentment over the disputed election results to stir up popular unrest.

No room for agitators

In due time, the tribunal will hand down a decision. But in the meantime, there should be no room whatsoever for agitators feeding on the emotional sympathy for Poe, to frustrate the completion of the process.

The controversy over in what way Poe will be honored and buried is already settled, and no agitator is welcome.

Some worthwhile proposals have been suggested—including burying him with a state funeral and flying the flag at half-staff.

There are rules for these honors.

He did very well in his various stints in the film industry. He has been recognized with several awards associated with film.

In political terms, Poe was a neophyte. His presidential bid put to the people the issue of choosing between progress and these charisma.

It also showed up the flaws of the electoral system. His defeat posed a challenge to the opposition that may have aroused, it should do more than provide hopes of winning powers on charismatic personalities.

The outpourings of grief for Poe warns the political establishment that there is a massive, latent constituency of disadvantaged Filipinos who can easily be mobilized for mobilization for political movements more dangerous than anything and identifying with films of political heroes/fools.

PNP says . . .

From page A1

crime rate the past 10 months, fewer people have been killed, kidnapped or raped. The number of stolen vehicles has also gone down.

All this translated to a 9.83-per cent drop in crime volume from January to October compared to the same period in 2003, the PNP-reported yesterday.

From a total of 71,182 incidents last year, crime volume decreased by 6,997 to 64,365.

Of the total for the 10-month period, 31,260 were "index" crimes or incidents like rape and murder that "occur with enough frequency and regularity so that they serve as an index to the crime situation," according to the PNP report.

The rest were "secondary" crimes—those that refer to carnapping, illegal gambling, child abuse and prostitution.

The PNP said index crimes decreased by 1.2 percent while non-index crimes fell 18.33 percent.

Theft up

Among index crimes, murder cases dropped 3 percent, homicide 11.38 percent, physical injury 3.71 percent, and robbery 8.68 percent. Only theft shot up, by 7.26 percent from 6,275 cases in 2003 to 6,881 in January-October this year.

Street crimes, including drug pushing and robbery, dropped to 12,623 cases from 14,867 in the same period in 2003. Of this year's cases, 11,293 were solved, paving way for 89.45-percent crime solution efficiency.

Kidnap-for-ransom, a problem particular in the Chinese-Filipino community, seemed to have been contained this year.

Compared to last year's 37 incidents, there were only 28 reported cases this year, translating to a 64-percent decrease. Of the 28 cases, 18 were solved and 50 kidnapper were either killed or arrested.

Car theft down

The PNP also made significant gains in the drive against car thieves, a problem that has made Quezon City the country's "car theft capital." This year, there were 6,881 cases reported, or 19 incidents daily. The incidence of car theft dropped 13 percent from 2,170 vehicles to 1,948.

As for drug trafficking, the PNP said it had arrested 18,314 peddlers and users in 15,291 operations during the 10-month period, besides dismantling 10 shabu laboratories.

The campaign against bank robbers, however, had poor results. Of the 46 cases recorded nationwide, only eight were solved.

Balloons, butterflies to grace KC burial

From page A1

planted why RC and FPJ had the same burial date.

"The family decided to bury RC on Dec. 22 because that day is a Thursday. Wednesday" she said referring to the Holy Rosary's Glorious Mystery.

Gina's youngest sister, Cleona Sangil, said few people bury their dead on Wednesday and they decided against burying RC on a "non-travel" Tuesday."

500 butterflies

"It's purely a coincidence," she added.

Sangil said the Requiem Mass would be 9a.-10 Dec. 22 at 9 a.m. at the Immaculate de Sion Sanctuary.

"We are requesting everyone to be there by 8:30 a.m.," she stressed. "We also want the symbolism to exercise solemnity during the service."

Six bishops will sing during the Mass. This will be followed by eulogies from six of RC's closest friends and a final send-off in the parish garden.

Six thousand white balloons and 500 colorful butterflies will be released," Sangil said, adding that RC's favorite song will be played during the open-air mass.

Rich and famous

Politicians, Cabinet officials, businessmen, friends, classmates, relatives, bodyguards and aides comprised the close to 900 people who came to condole with the Speaker and his family over the weekend.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, who considered the death of RC a personal loss, attended Mass on Friday, the first day of the wake after the fire.

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye, Palace chief of staff Rigoberto Tiglao, PNP Director General Edgar Aglipay were seen at the wake.

Sen. Miguel Zubiri Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr., his wife Gretchen and son Rep. Carlos "Charlie" Cojuangco were also spotted.

PLDT chair Manny Pangilinan was there with aides and bodyguards. So were Lea Salonga, Charlene Gonzales and Amalia Fuentes.

Seen mourning with the Jr. Venecia couple were former Rep. Dakipan "Bigo" Dilangalen and Gov. Raul Daza.

"This is beyond politics, we feel for the Speaker's grief," said Dilangalen, who is also spokesperson for deposed President Joseph Estrada.

Fun-room

Also present was Rep. Carlos Padilla who said that he came to be with Speaker De Venecia. Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile was also spotted.

He seemed to put his last respects to FPJ, but the wake, Padilla said, had become too political.

"This not even sure if I'm welcome there," he said.

Of course, the family didn't forget RC's classmates and friends, who gathered in a "fun room" set up by RC's cousins.

The room, next to the area where the rest was, had RC's things and memorabilia from friends and relatives, including her favorite food.

They also showed a video of the young, pretty and smart RC who had dreamed of one day going to Harvard.

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ENTERTAINMENT Metro

Ulor Louie C. Cantero
Antonio Odon Ferreria G. Velarde

Hilary Swank's comeback worthy of Muhammad Ali

HWANK teams up with fellow Oscar winner Clint Eastwood in this serious movie.

LOS ANGELES—Hilary Swank showed signs of becoming one of those actresses who wins an Academy Award first, bids him a succession of forgettable roles. But with Clint Eastwood's splendid "Million Dollar Baby," she makes a comeback worthy of Muhammad Ali, playing a waitress hoping to rise above her hard knock life by training as a boxer.

Barely a year after the release of "Middle River," Eastwood delivers a second concern, two drama that forthrightly probes the shadows of human mortality without falling back on easy answers.

Along with Swank, who won a best actress Oscar for "Boys Don't Cry" Eastwood is receiving serious awards consideration as both lead actor and director. The film itself should follow "Master Xavier" as a best picture contender, and co-star Morgan Freeman belongs among the front-runners for supporting actor.

Crackling dialogue

Adapted from short stories by former boxing "cut man" F.X. Toole, the screenplay by Paul Haggis crackles with tough-guy dialogue and insightful scene windows.

Eastwood plays irritable manlike part-owner and boxing trainer Frankie Dunn, a gruff cobbler man with an estranged daughter and a host of personal ties for which he cannot find atonement, despite attending Mass each morning.

Frankie's grim servants hard-luck eyes, including ex-fighter Eddie "Scrap Iron" Dupris (Freeman)—Scrap for short—who makes an astute home in the gym back room and fills a variety of roles from cleaning toilets to answering up and running athletes.

After a fighter Frankie has groomed for a title shot jumps ship to another manager, a new one, rookie enters his life, Maggie Fitzgerald (Swank). It matters with a harsh upbringing behind her and nothing but a lifetime of hard ups ahead, Maggie turns to boxing, the only thing she ever felt good doing.

Frankie initially scorns her desire to fight, seeing the 30-year-old Maggie is too old to train and that competition boxing among women is a fad, the "latest freak show out there."

Exuberant half

Script takes pity on Maggie and issues her some nuggets of advice. And gradually, Frankie is enchanted, too, first by exactitudes over blog, girl's coarse boxing form, later by her indomitable high spirits and screaming, which seem packaged with a natural ability to punch opponents' lights out.

Maggie's transition from clumsy confidante to potential champion is abrupt but easy enough to accept given the exuberance of the film's central cast, where she and Frankie fall into a delightful surrogate father-daughter relationship and she becomes the darling of fight crowds.

Just when it seems the film will wrap up as a satisfying "Rocky"-like chick flick, "Million Dollar Baby" turns deep and dark, presenting a harsh ethical dilemma that comes patently two performances from Eastwood and Swank.

Eastwood and Freeman fall back into the same easy camaraderie they demonstrated in the director's dark "Unforgiven." Freeman's voice-overs, delivered with sonorous dedainment, serve as an emotional anchor and surely complement the action.

Forlorn scare

The score by Eastwood, with orchestration by his longtime collaborator Lennie Niehaus, provides a suitably forlorn musical backdrop reminiscent of the spare tones of "Unforgiven."

The closing image—in no equivocal tone, at least—also harks back to the uncertain ending of that great Western.

For the decade or so between "Unforgiven" and "Mystic River," Eastwood mostly made commonplace movies. At 74, Eastwood has hit a late-career stride. With nothing to prove to anyone, he's willing to tackle ambivalent characters and ideas and questions rarely seen in Hollywood films.

"Million Dollar Baby," a Warner Bros. release, runs 132 minutes. AP

'Million Dollar Baby' should be a strong best-picture contender

For Bobby Darin devotees only

NEW YORK—Quick show of hands: Who wants to see Kevin Spacey singing and dancing for two hours as Bobby Darin?

Come on, people, be looks and sounds just like him!

Well, Kevin Spacey wanted to see Kevin Spacey as Bobby Darin. That seems to be the entire point of "Beyond the Sea," in which he plays the crooner from his star to mean and movie pops. Lucky in the '50s, through his turn as a folk singer the big, the Vietnam War, and up to his death following open-heart surgery in 1973.

Spacey told The Associated Press earlier this year: "This wasn't about an actor's ego, wanting to get my cracks off by singing on a movie." But by hunkering as director, co-writer and star, he's created a film that feels unshakably like a vanity project.

You have to admire Spacey for his enthusiasm, though, and for sharing the same unflappable sense of determination to get the film made as the character he's playing in the film itself.

HE'S A Darin too old for the role, but Kevin Spacey doesn't care.

Sounds like . . .

And he's at least trying to do something different with the biopic structure—though it's strangely similar to the similarly painful Cole Porter movie, "De-Lovely," which must have been a coincidence because they came out during the same year.

Just as that earlier film, in which a dying Porter sits in a theater and watches his story unfold onstage with an archangel Gabriel figure sent to him, "Beyond the Sea" begins with Darin, making a farewell concert about his life, with a child version of himself (William Ullrich) guiding him through the highlights.

The structure is incredibly clunky to possibly drawing attention to itself and away from the key events in Darin's life we're supposed to care about. And young Bobby shows up at totally obvious emotional times (when Darin's mother dies, for example) as if we couldn't figure out for ourselves that those are the moments in which an adult feels like a scared, confused child.

Bobby's mother (Brenda Blethyn, doing a heavy New York accent) was the one who pushed him into show business in the first place. Blethyn with rheumatic fever as a child, he wasn't expected to live past 15, but his love of performing sings like "Mack the Knife" and the film's title tune somehow kept him alive until 37.

A little creepy

But Spacey, the "American Beauty" star, is 45 and looks it—a fact he acknowledges in the film early on by having Darin's brother-in-law (Bob Hoskins, wasted in a supporting role) bark, "It's a cruel portrait on film! He was born to play the part and you damn well know it!"

His age becomes inconsequential, though, when Darin starts wooing 20-year-old Sandra Dee (the sunny Kate Bosworth) at the set of a movie they made together. At real life, Darin was eight years older than Dee. Also in real life, Spacey is 24 years older than Bosworth, which is closer than a little creepy and makes their romance scenes together totally unbearable to watch, except for the train-wreck factor.

Closely "Beyond the Sea" is for Darin devotees only, who will not only ignore this and other unconvincing scenes, but they'll probably already have seen Spacey on tour with a 70-piece big band, singing Darin's songs live. AP

Celebrity Christmas cards for Pinoys away from home

CELEBRITIES took time out to add to the Christmas cheer even as they crowded their artistic side. They created Christmas cards, which will be given to Filipino workers on board the Star Cruise ships who will be away from home on Christmas.

The cards and their designs were just as colorful and as varied as the people who made them.

Award-winning actor Christopher de Leon drew a beautiful pencil sketch of local beige at duty jars.

Fashion design guru Raja Laurel showed that fashion is indeed for him. His card has a girl in a glamorous gown holding out a gift.

The card by Raphael Fernandez has the line "Home is Just Over the Horizon" written under a receding jam sketch of a sunset on the horizon.

Actor and model Luke Jickain has a cute for homesickness—a scene from Edsa/Kamuning on the cover of his card.

Christmas trees are popular with deep-dyed gorgeous models Precious Hicaldez, brothers (and twin of photographer Sharah Uy) Timothy and Christopher Uy, Starbucks winner Yasmien Kurdi, and Gabriel de Leon.

Other symbols of Christmas are TV host Pinoymix Raimundo's sexually "lonely" Santa's pair of hanging in a tulip bed; model Bubbles Paraiso's snowman; Nina Fernandez's Santa, and Christmas ribbons by Evelyn Ojo and Jasmine Trias Mead.

Dressed as actor Tess San Gutierrez's dog designed by Mel Cruzucci, his actress wife Abel Mercader's Chihuahua wears, and talent manager Gabi Gokiy Ramos.

Hispanic are also popular. From the local museum trio Gian Signion Reyna aides, Yasmien Kurdi and Cesar Mills both have colorful cards, the finishing a funny beach scene, and here a happy dog in a Santa hat.

Former beauty queen Gwen Bulilla has pastel renditions of many Christmas staples. Tall, dark and handsome model Zanjoe Marudo has multicolored patterns on his.

Endorsers of leading American watch brand Timex—actress Claudine Barretto, actor/singer Basilio Fernandez and hunky Australian TV host Mary Nelson—also made cards of their own. These, too, will be sent to the Filipino crew on board Star Cruises ships.

Timex will help send and distribute the cards. Timex also celebrates its 150th year of precision timekeeping this year, and this is its way of reaching out during the holidays.

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Cebuano nurse makes it big in Nevada

Front page A1

and his school tuition. Initially, he wanted to become a doctor. But he settled for the next best thing when he realized his parents could not afford to send him to medical school.

This took up nursing at the Cebu State College-Cebu City Medical Center College of Nursing (CSMC) where he graduated cum laude in 1990. While waiting for the results of his board exams, Tan volunteered to work at the CCMC-a hospital run by the city government.

In 1992, he took the Commission on Examiners of Foreign Nursing Graduates just to see if he would pass. He did. Then he applied for a job in the United States to find out if a hospital would be willing to hire him. Las Vegas Hospital responded.

The employment agency asked for $4,000 in placement fees and other expenses.

Realizing it was difficult for him to come up with the amount, Tan told his agency that he would not be able to go The United States. But there months later, he received a notice that his visa application had been approved.

He left on Aug. 25, 1994 with only $300 in his pocket and without any word from the hospital as to when he was supposed to start working. His parents borrowed money from relatives and friends for his airfare. He only paid a portion of the placement fee and promised the agency that he would pay the rest later.

Nightmare

Tan recalled that his first day in the United States was a nightmare. Contrary to what the agency had promised, nobody fetched him and two other CCMC nurses—Anjo Nuñeza and Cecilia Tagaya—at the Las Vegas International Airport.

After four hours of waiting and lots of prayers, he placed a collect call to his agency representative in the Philippines. It turned out the one assigned to fetch the group was in another state to pick up another group. They were then given phone numbers of two Filipino nurses—Joanna Delarmente and Cecilia Bravata—in Las Vegas, who had arrived two months earlier.

The nurses asked them to take a cab to their apartments. "The thought of taxi stories from back home heightened my anxiety some more. After a long wait, we boarded a cab," Tan said.

After giving the driver the address, silence filled the cab. Then the driver asked them where they were from. Tan said him meekly "from the Philippines, Cebu."

A long pause followed. Then the driver said "fortunate...." bringing relief to the group. It turned out that the driver had a sister back home in Cebu after marrying a Cebuano. He gave the group a quick tour of Las Vegas before bringing them to the apartment.

But the next four months proved to be a test of perseverance. Tan still had no job. He and the other nurses had to share a living room futon because under the leasing law, only four adults could live in a two-bedroom apartment like hers and visitors could stay for only two weeks.

In the second week, Delarmente recruited an overtime worker. Then he paid the other $1,000 to get a job in the hotel. They would take turns in the chore of somebody knocked on the door. The three sometimes stayed in the mall until late in the evening so the rate would know they were still staying in the apartment.

Tan's patience paid off. He made the most of the idle time. He reviewed for the nursing state board exams, with a burning desire to pass it on his family in Cebu would not think him a big waste for naught.

After three weeks, the three nurses from Cebu decided to leave. Tan went with Tagaya who had a cousin in San Diego. Tan stayed there for a month, doing household chores and babysitting. She then went to Los Angeles and lived with her teacher, Maria Flores, who invited him in after she learned that he was in San Diego.

Perseverance

Homesick and penniless, his self-esteem plunged. There were times he wanted to give up—just pass the exams and go home.

Then a card came from a friend in Cebu. Folded inside were $17 in old bills and a note: "Bal, these are the dollars I owed you! time that I could share with you. Hope it will help you a little bit. Merry Christmas." Tan cried.

Finally, a call from Las Vegas Hospital came in December 1994. He started working as a nursing assistant, getting only $8 per hour. He changed diapers, bathed patients and helped them use the bedpan.

Tan started working as staff nurse when he passed his residency exams and the state board exams in February 1995. But he could barely sit down and eat lunch because he was assigned to take care of 30 patients.

His hard work paid off. He was named nurse supervisor, then assistant director of nursing and later director of nursing services. He was recruited to join the faculty of the University and Community College System of Nevada.

Next he is a full-time professor, teaching Medical Surgical and Psychiatric Nursing. He also runs two psychiatric clinics, along with two psychiatrists, as an advanced nurse practitioner.

Compassionate

He also makes the rounds in emergency rooms in the Las Vegas valley doing psychiatric consultation and evaluation. Tan is also a Home Education coordinator in Nathan Adelson Hospice.

Then he developed a training program for "end of life care," which was designed to educate student nurses on how to take care for terminally ill patients like those afflicted with cancer and AIDS.

With the nursing shortage, hospice care is in dire need of nursing and compassionate nurses," Tan said. The program is now in full swing after getting a donation of close to $100,000 from the Multi-Mango Bellagio Casino.

In October, Tan said he was informed that he had been chosen as someone belonging to the top 5 percent of the educators in America. He, then, is included in the book titled "Who's Who Among America's Top Teachers."

Tan knows how to spread his blessings. Last year, he and Tagaya formed the Maria Libres Flores Nursing Scholarship Foundation in honor of the teacher who allowed him to stay in Los Angeles. The foundation provides scholarship to two nursing students.

He also started the Yolanda Alimoyan Tan Scholarship Foundation, a high school scholarship named after his mother. Tan said he would pay the secondary education of at least two poor graduates of San Nicolas Elementary School, where his mother had taught until she retired.

He also plans to put up a hospice Care Center in Cebu, which will provide care to terminally ill patients.

COLUMBIA GLOBAL PHOTO SALES CORP

Lanterns prove RP can achieve synergy

From page A1

"It's ang mga parol ng mga bayaning Pilipino at mga mga inspiring ang mga ito bilang icon (These are the heroes of the Filipino nation, and I hope they shine throughout the year)," he said.

Rajasthan spirit

Ambassador Mario Schiff of Argentina, Jorge Montero of Chile, as well as the ambassadors and Japanese nationals, their families and friends were there for the event.

Mayor Oscar Rodriguez told guests that the lanterns were the products of craftsmen and their families in the villages of San Fernando, dubbed as the "Christmas capital of the Philippines."

"The lanterns you are now seeing dance in the spirit of Rajasthan (reincarnation)," Rodriguez said of the land south of Kashmir, of Mahatmas Ibn Jasso, Isa Jones, Dolores, Sta. Lucia, Sto. Niño, San Nicolas, Del Pilar, Sto. Rosario and San Felipe.

"Like the Star of Bethlehem that led the Three Magi to the humble manger of Christ more than 2,000 years ago, they symbolize hope for the renewal of faith in God and love for others," Rodriguez said.

Lantern performance

The lantern makers worked three months to produce the masterpieces of the town on. The city government gave each village P150,000, which included reimbursement money for materials and food expenses of the craftsmen.

In the first round, the time limit is "performed" in the time of different melodies lasting five minutes each.

In the second round, the lanterns were divided into three groups and each group "performed" for three minutes each.

In the third and last round, time lanterns performed simultaneously for ten minutes.

The judges, standing shoulder to shoulder, composed mostly of families, were awed by the visual performance.

Once unmoved, the lanterns were cones, flowers or jewels. The next minute, they were one magnificent assemblage of patterns.

What was equally amazing was that the lanterns twinkled and changed color in time with the music, whether it was a rendition of marching tune, a Tagalog carol or the San Isaac Christmas medley.

Craftsmen say the "magic secret" of every giant lantern is its rotor, an aluminum drum rolled into a barrel. To maneuver it, a used car wheel is attached to the barrel.

The barrel is also equipped with a male switch that is connected to an electrical outlet.

How they do it

But how do craftsmen design the lighting patterns?

Selected surfaces of the barrel are covered with masking tape. This way, only the exposed portions have contact with electricity.

Hairpins are an conductors of electricity from the barrel to the bulbs. Electric wires are knotted to the hairpins that are nearly welded in a row on a circular just below the barrel. The wires, in turn, are connected to the light bulbs fitted inside the lantern.

Pilares, a barrel's switch is turned on, and the barrel is rotated on a particular direction, a specific set of bulbs lights up.

A lantern can have 4 to 10 rotors, depending on the complexity of its design.

The illusion of dancing lights is, however, achieved by the adeptness of the rotor operators.

Three men, whose hands hold the wheels, actually dance to the accompanying music to get the right tempo for the lanterns.

And the winner is

Everything depends on accuracy and the human touch, according to Rodriguez. Quisumbing said, adding that it would be hard to achieve the same effect if one were to computerize the rotor.

This year, judges chose Quisumbing's entry, the San Felipe lantern, as the most beautiful of the year. This was the second consecutive year that the village of San Felipe won the much-coveted championship trophy.

The lanterns of the villages of San Roque and San Juan came in second and third, respectively.

The harried traces its roots to religious traditions introduced by the Augustinian Order.

From simple candles and oil lamps arranged in intricate papier mache housing, the lanterns evolved into tubelets.

The lubinas are lanterns fashioned in the shape of birds, fishes and stars, illuminated on bamboo poles, they light the paths of the parish saints during processions.

The lanterns get bigger and more intricate when the town got electricity in the 1930s.

Not so festive Christmas for local decor makers

From page B1

sters whose lower costs are making heavy inroads.

The irony is that the Philippines, a predominantly Christian country which Christmas is one of the most important events of the year, is losing ground to countries which regard it in common and secular only.

The Philippines' share of the market has been dropping since the late 1990s. Department of Trade and Industry figures say that in 2003, the Philippines accounted for 1.91 percent of the $4.3 billion worth of Christmas decorations exports worldwide.

In 2001, that figure had dipped to 1.86 percent of the total, although the market had grown to $5.41 billion worldwide.

China has been the No. 1 exporter of Christmas decorations since the 1990s with the Philippines ranking ninth, behind even Taiwan and Thailand.

Falling exports

From $60 million worth of Christmas decorations exports in 1999, the Philippines saw this figure fall to $58 million by 2003. Quite saw its exports grow from $4.08 billion to $6.35 billion in the same period.

Marlene Villareal, head of the Christmas Bazaar Producers and Exporters Association of the Philippines, said the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States and foreign travel advisories about potential terrorists here hurt the industry further, discouraging foreign buyers from visiting to look at samples.

Philippine manufacturers can rarely afford to take all their samples to trade shows abroad, said Nani Filler-Leong, president of Bamboo Bazaar, an industry leaders.

But Villareal said: "The main reason we are really losing is that a lot of our buyers started shifting their orders from us to China because they (the Chinese) can copy our designs and offer it at one-third a price of ours."

The Christmas decorations industry had been a success story for the Philippines just a decade ago, particularly since its growth was spearheaded by small, cottage industries.

Many of the companies began with people making decorations in their own homes, only to find themselves expanding as Western buyers took notice of the fine craftsmanship and original designs.

Typical producer

Filler-Leong is a typical producer who started off making decorations for friends. After joining a trade show out of curiosity, she found an eager foreign buyers in 1987 and quickly expanded.

Her home was transformed in to an impromptu factory. "We had boxes in our bedroom. The only place I could sit quietly was in the toilet," she recalled.

At its peak, Tanika Decors employed 1,000 people. Today, her company only employs about half that number.

Many of the other companies are still small, employing only 10-20 employees. They rely on subcontractors who often work from home, Villareal said.

Philippine manufacturers, who rely on hand-made products, cannot compete with China's low labor costs, not to mention low power rates and huge raw material supplies, Villareal said.

As a result, some Filipino decor makers have already set up operations in China, she added.

But Villareal remains hopeful the Philippines can regain some lost ground with its higher-quality products.

"What I noticed is that starting this year, some of the buyers who moved to China are coming back to the Philippines," she said.

Better Philippine designs and quality should be an advantage in reaching the high-end market with such products. Like artworks, unique table-top Christmas baskets, candelabra and large figurines of angels and the Nativity scene, Villareal said.

"A lot of the buyers who are more discriminating, continued buying from us," she recalled.

The cultural affinities of the Westernized, Christianized, English-speaking Filipinos are also an advantage.

Understanding West

"The Filipinos understand Christmas. We understand how the West thinks, the pace of the West. We know what the buyers really like," Villareal said.

Filler-Leong, however, warns that some of her designers have been lured away to work in China.

To bring down costs, Philippine decorations manufacturers are cooperating instead of competing, with common sourcing of raw materials, sharing of subcontractors and even helping supply each other for large orders, Villareal said.

Philippine manufacturers should find a niche each to with limited edition products. "There are specialty items that don't like the manufactured look," Filler-Leong said.

"We have it both in China who have been entering us in get in China and set up a factory there," she added.

But she said "my husband and I are up to the business be the Philippines and to give jobs in the Filipino people."

If they can help eager women enable to the Philippines, "we will probably not go to China. We will just retire," Filler-Leong said.

AFP

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Bueno

Saddam trial process opens with grilling of 'Chemical Ali'

BAGHDAD—War crimes trials against Saddam Hussein and his closest lieutenants moved forward on Saturday when his feared cousin known as "Chemical Ali" was the first to face a formal interview with the chief investigating magistrate.

Iraq's US-backed government had promised trials would begin before next month's election, the first free vote since Saddam rose to power three decades ago. But the judge stressed his meetings with Ali Hassan al-Majid and the former Defense Minister Sultan Hashem were just the start of a long process.

"Carrying out will not help this case," Said Jouhi said.

Official and silent film of the two hearings showed both men looking relaxed, chatting and smiling under guard. Majid fanned on a wilting sink, possibly still suffering from wounds sustained while on the run from invading US forces last year.

Some Iraqi officials have dismissed the publicity as little more than an election ruse. Tonight (part by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. However that may be, the 67-year-old cousin, dictator and his aides have now been given access to lawyers.

After brief appearance in July to hear possible charges of crimes against humanity and genocide against Kurds passed by a Saddam-loyalist control, the formal process of deciding who is tried for what is under way, a year after Saddam was caught.

The Jan. 30 elections will furnish a national assembly that will draw up a new constitution and, which regime hopes, give Iraq a legitimate government, to replace the de facto US rule that filled the vacuum left by the overthrow of the South Party.

US officials concede on its sovereignty among Saddam's former rich minority poses the major threat in the absence of forming a representative legislature. Three election of them in Sunni northern Iraq came under attack in the latest incidents.

Two people were killed and eight were wounded, including six National Guards, when mortars landed on an election office in Irqah, 10 km north of Baghdad. It is one of many around the country registering and educating voters.

A mortar also landed on an election office in the northern oil capital of Kirkuk, where ethnic tensions among Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen are high ahead of a polling now delayed locally.

National Guards fought off gunmen who attacked an election office 40 km southwest of Kirkuk.

Insurgents who are becoming effective in more lengths of wealth and remembering to a cold winter without heat and light for many. Blew up a key oil-export pipeline near Kirkuk, halting flow for the second time in a week.

In the big northern city of Mosul, scene of widespread bloodshed in recent weeks, seven children in a suffocated bus armor hit when a roadside bomb missed a US patrol. One child died.

The British foreign ministry said several guards there in Baghdad Embassy were killed in Mosul on Friday and others were missing. Witnesses saw four people killed in one car, apparently Turks.

"We recognize that there are some real concerns," a Western official, briefing reporters this week on condition of anonymity, said of the need to secure an election for which US troop numbers are being increased by some 10 percent to 150,000.

Asked what would happen if, as some Sunni leaders fear and others are encouraging, the 20 percent Sunni Arab minority stays away in large part from the polling stations, the official said: "Clearly we want a representative assembly. What will happen if there isn't sufficient Sunni participation for this to be representative ? wouldn't want to speculate."

A lack of Sunni voters would be the share of the Shiite 60 percent and the Kurds, who account for upto 15 percent.

White clerics have rejected accusations from Allawi's secular allies that they are a unifying force for Iranian-style rule by clerics. ayatollahs—a line taken up by the officials who say Iraq deserves prefer secular rule.

President George W. Bush has already warned US advisories to "Democracy is new for Iraq.

Jouhi told reporters there was no set timetable for the trials, each of which will be prepared by different judges.

Majid and Hashem appeared in turn, both being released from handcuffs and seated on a folding chair in a bare room before Jouhi's desk, on which lay a Koran wrapped in green cloth.

Jouhi, who presided over the brief hearings for Saddam and the others in July, and both men on Saturday had legal counsel. Reuters

SADDAM in clothes during the day of his Iraqi special tribunal hearing in this July 1, 2004, photo.

ISRAELI armored vehicles withdrawal the Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza strip from a military staging area in the Gush Katif settlement bloc, Dec. 12. The incursion followed a bloody attack by Palestinian militants last Sunday that left five Israeli soldiers dead near a border crossing into Egypt at Rafah, also in southern Gaza.

Israel pulls out of Gaza after killing 11 Palestinians

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip—Israeli troops moved out of a Palestinian refugee camp in southern Gaza on Saturday night, the same night, ending a two-day raid that killed 11 Palestinians and wounded dozens, the largest Israeli military operation since Yasser Arafat's death last month.

The raid in Khan Yunis was launched Friday in response to Palestinian mortar and rocket attacks over the past week. Israel had said it would refrain from major offensives in the run-up to the Jan. 9 Palestinian elections, but would take action if attacked.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Likud Party and the opposition Labor Party reached to finalize their pact to form a coalition government amid reports the new Cabinet—which Sharon seeks to bolster his government as he carries out a planned Gaza withdrawal—could be sworn in as early as Thursday.

Residents of Khan Yunis said they saw 18 Israeli tanks pulling out of the area. Israeli military and Palestinian security confirmed the troops had left.

In the Khan Yunis fighting Saturday, two militants were killed by Israeli tank fire in separate incidents. Palestinian hospital officials said. The body of a third Palestinian was also in the head was recovered yesterday morning, medical officials said. It was unclear whether he was a militant.

A total of 11 Palestinians, including at least seven militants, were killed and 43 others wounded, since Israeli tanks and bulldozers entered the camp Friday. Palestinian medical personnel said. Two children under the age of 16 were among the wounded. One Israeli soldier also was wounded.

Hundreds of residents who had evacuated their homes began returning to the camp once Though the area was engulfed in complete darkness because the electric grid had been damaged in the operations. Some residents found their homes demolished or damaged but officials said it was not immediately clear how many.

The raid was in response to more than 50 mortar and rocket attacks launched by Palestinians over the past week which killed a Thai worker in a Jewish settlement and injured 17 other people, including 11 soldiers, in the same raid.

The army said some houses used by militants to launch mortars or rockets were targeted in the operation.

On Saturday, Palestinian militants in northern Gaza launched three homemade rockets, two of which landed in Israel but caused no injuries or damage, the army said.

Underscoring the Likud-Labor coalition plans, Labor leader Shimon Peres would become vice premier, a post he would share with Likud Cabinet Minister Ehud Olmert.

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Sale of $3-B Hong Kong property faces collapse

HONG KONG—The fate of a US$3 billion real estate privatization scheme hung in the balance Sunday as the government tried to prevent a potentially embarrassing collapse of the world's largest property transaction.

The launch of the planned sell-off of 180 shopping malls and 79,000 car parking spaces on public housing estates has been thrown into serious doubt by an elderly female tenant who challenged the decision in court.

Government officials including chief executive Tung Chee-hwa and financial secretary Antony Leung met for another crisis meeting Sunday morning to decide whether the listing would go ahead on Monday as planned.

Tung and Secretary for the Chinese of saving the scheme by ing ahead was "slim" given the legal uncertainties.

Local press, citing unnamed sources, reported that the government had decided to pull out of the controversial privatization scheme due to the "high risks" involved as the prospectus of the sale did not mention possible legal challenges.

It would only go ahead if the residents promised not to take the case to the Court of Final Appeal, they said.

An announcement was originally due at 4 p.m. on Sunday but it has been pushed back due to "legal problems," a Housing Authority spokesperson said.

On Friday the city's highest court, the Court of Final Appeal, allowed 67-year-old Ip Shu-kwan 28 days to lodge an appeal against lower court decisions which upheld the authority's right to privatize the assets.

The premium was seeking a judicial review of the listing of the so-called Link Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) claiming the deal undervalued public assets, shoes changes in the public and threatens to lead to rent rises for public housing tenants.

Democratic legislator Emily Lau criticized the government's handling of the listing.

"They have known a long time ago that there has been public discontent about the sale. They should deal with this problem first but they chose to ignore people's voices," she told AFP.

Lau, head of pro-democracy group the Frontier, also blasted the lack of transparency as the root cause of the difficulties.

"The Frontier has tried to discuss with them about the plan for a long time but that was also ignored. When we did get a chance to speak to them, they did not want to disclose much information. I hope they have learned their lesson now," she said.

Andrew To, a district councilor and one of Lau's representatives, likened what he called to reckless government for the hurdles.

"There has been a lot of criticism about the sale. The legislators have told the government to pull out and there have been talks about judicial review, yet they insist on doing it without public consensus," he said.

To said even scrapping the listing would cause less damage than going ahead as more lawsuits could be filed against it.

A fresh lawsuit was heard by the High Court Saturday evening as a disgruntled investor sought urgent leave to apply for a judicial review and the return of her money.

But her application was promptly rejected by the court. It ruled her case covered a private and civil matter and that she should seek compensation with the Link REIT instead. AFP

STILL UNANSWERED Famed aviatrix Amelia Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, pose in front of their twin-engine Lockheed Electra in Los Angeles on May 1937, prior to their attempt to fly around the world. Plane are about to spring 2000 to swing the ocean floor in a 1,000-square-mile swath with sonar, the latest in a string of missions, to answer what happened to Earhart and Noonan.

Austrians thwart bid to assassinate Nokor leader's son

SEOUL—Austrian security forces foiled an attempt to assassinate a son of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il during a European trip in December, Yonhap News reported on Sunday.

The report of the plot against Kim Jong-nam came amid persistent rumors of internal political strife in the militaristic communist state and within the nation's first family itself.

Citing a source familiar with North Korean affairs, Yonhap said the failed plot had been planned by North Koreans favoring either of Kim Jong-il's sons as his eventual successor.

Kim ran into an attempt to assassinate him during his visit to Europe in mid-November, but was tipped by intelligence agencies and "escaped a trip to adventure and perished him," the source was quoted as saying. "The attempt was made by anti-Kim Chong-nam groups in North Korea."

South Korea's National Intelligence Service could not confirm the report but said Seoul's government was checking it.

In November, Seoul Financial markets were swept by rumors that Kim Jong-il had been assassinated or overthrown.

At the same time, diplomats and officials were reported as saying that some of Kim's personnel had been removed from public places. The South's official KCNA news agency later denied this.

Long seen as his 42-year-old father's heir apparent, Kim Jong-nam's star is thought to have waned after he was caught trying to smuggle into Japan on a false passport in 2000.

Although a shrub reclusive, Pyongyang introduced market reforms in mid-2002, many of its people rely on foreign aid and energy shortages mean that its industry barely works.

Reuters

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ENTERTAINMENT Me

Reason to smile

By Aerwin Adina

Miss RP World Maria Karla Bautista is determined to be the ultimate example of "beauty with a purpose"

"I HOPE to help abused women as a beauty."

WHILE the country was battling storms of tragedy from four successive typhoons, a Filipina was making waves in Sanya, China, in the world of beauty pageants.

Reclaiming Filipino-World Maria Karla Bautista's crowned her year of victory on Dec. 4 with a Top 5 finish in Miss World 2004. Being the highest ranked Asian in the pageant, she won other prestigious titles and Oceania's Queen of Beauty, the same award Bell's Gutierrez received when the serena finished third in the same pageant in 1993.

Karla has given the country a three-year-11 ranket placement in the widest and oldest international pageants in the world. Katherine Moralde was in the final 10 in 2002, while Mahlar Tenorio was in the Top 15 last year.

"I hope that amidst all the calamity, I have given Filipinos a reason to smile," Karla said the media upon her arrival last Monday.

Karla went to China last month, fully aware of the hard work ahead. But she also knew that her countrymen would not let her down. "I wouldn't have made it this far without your help," she told her fellowmen. "Receiving flowers, calls, and text messages ... made me feel happy."

The winners

For the first time in the pageant's 54-year history, this year's winner was selected by public voting. Telephone, SMS and online votes from over 100 countries were tabulated to determine the winner. Miss Peru's Maria Julia Mantilla Garcia took this richer consistents for the title. She was also The Americas' Queen of Beauty.

Claudia Cruz of the Dominican Republic ranked second and was The Caribbean's Queen of Beauty. United States' Stacey Rachell, winner of the "last-ditch" Beach Beauty competition, placed third. Completing the Top 5 is Finland's Eszmeyra Barsowicz, Europe's Queen of Beauty.

For the voting, a point system was implemented by the pageant organizers. Instead of getting the total number votes for each delegate, points were allocated for each country's 10 highest vote getters. The highest ranked delegate in a country received 10 points, while the second got 9 points, and so on.

The five delegates who won in the last-week events received an additional 15 points and automatically landed in the Top 15. Aside from Plancy, the other four-week winners were Wales' Amy Cox in Miss Sports and Fitness; Mexico's Yessica Ramirez, Top Model; Miss Talent, and Australia's Sarah Davies, Congeniality Choice, voted by the delegates.

Completing the Top 15 were Jin Yang of the People's Republic of China, Anna Dzhavadzhi of Czech Republic, Russia's Tatiana Silnetchuk, Trinidad and Tobago's Kendalle Thom, Nigeria's Tiki Ibiyeri of Vietnam, and Nigeria's Anita Umaghabi, who was also proclaimed Africa's Queen of Beauty.

Eye on the crown

Asked who she thought would win, Karla replied: "I came to the contest with the hope that I would be the winner. I knew someone was going to win and I hoped it would be me." But she said she was happy with Peru's victory. "She's pretty and smart; she'd make a great Miss World."

When Karla placed fourth in the Beach Beauty competition, she felt that greater things were coming her way. This was the primed feeling in her group, which included four more finists. The delegates were divided in eight groups and Karla belonged to Group 3.

Karla confessed that the girl hoped she would represent the continent in the Top 15. And she also has kind words for her "neighbor," Thailand, her roommate, was "very nice." Berna was "cute and funny like our youngest sister in the group." She gave Sweden of the best girls, as well as Miss Hong Kong.

She was not able to interact much with the girls from other groups but she did not mind that, she said, because she "momentarily" enjoyed the company of her own. Group 3 even held a pajama party after her outstanding performance in the Beach Beauty contest. And when Karla was called to the Top 5, her group frantically cheered backstage, prompting their chaperones to ask them to pipe down.

"My group was laid back, not competitive at all. We were just out to enjoy everything that happened," Karla said.

Talented, too

Karla also made an impression in the talent competition. Out of the more than 80 women who auditioned, she was among the 25 at her semi-talent/production number. Her first evening gown, which she had custom-designed herself.

International news caught pieces of Karla's mind to two press conferences. She was selected by pageant officials to speak in two engagements — the ABC/CBA conference and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. The latter turned out to be an occasion to defend the pageant when international reporters asked why she and the other girls participated in a contest where they were made "to display their bodies."

"I was told of this speaking engagement only five minutes prior," Karla recounted, laughing.

After the pageant, Karla hopes to use her victory to help typhoon victims. "Maybe I could invite people to donate money and goods. I still see my title to live out Miss World's principle, beauty with a purpose."

Looking at law

And when her reign ends in February next year, Karla will resume her studies at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. She was a sophomore Mass Communications road to UP Cebu when she joined the local pageant last March. Then she hopes to pursue a career in broadcasting "so I can save up for a good law school."

"I hope to help abused women as a lawyer," she said. "In deliberation me that in this modern age, women are still being mistreated, and they still think they deserve it." She also wishes to defend poor people who are "deprived of justice just because they can't afford good lawyers."

For now, Karla is busy on living the last months of her reign as a true beauty queen, one who puts a smile on her countrymen's face, just by being around.

Will Pamela get Chinese nod?

BEIJING — A semi-naked Pamela Anderson will beckon from Chinese billboards in a new anti-fur campaign — if the former "Baywatch" star can get past the censors.

The posters, featuring the slogan "Give fur the cold shoulder" in English, show the Canadian-born actress lying topless with her back to the camera and an arm partly hiding her right breast.

An image of Yifeng snow appears above Chinese characters reading "Cold shoulders are nothing compared to the cold they feel," and "Please don't wear fur."

China's outright hated media regulators have yet to give the posters a green light, said Jason Baker, a Hong Kong-based spokesman for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, which is promoting the anti-fur campaign.

"Depending on the censors, they may be convinced about it, but it's very unlikely done," Baker said.

"We may end up having to crop it for [them] a bit."

Too much sex

Chinese officials last week complained advertisers were using too much sexual innuendo and announced stricter screening rules for television ads.

According to PETA, China was the original 80 percent of all fur-coat-for imports in 2000.

"I'm perfectly happy to have my skin if it will help save animals' skins," Anderson was quoted as saying in the statement.

PETA also plans to post the Andersen pictures in tropical Singapore, whose consumers it said are being increasingly targeted by the fur industry.

Anderson, now a columnist for Jane magazine, is best known for her role in "Baywatch" and was formerly married to Motley Crue drummer Tommy Lee. She has been a longtime PETA and animal rights supporter. AP

Sharon Stone: Did she or didn't she?

LOS ANGELES — Actress Sharon Stone claims a fiercely skilful doctor abandoned and locked her by allegedly failing to perform a breast implant surgery on her in November.

The lawsuit cites actress in US Weekly and its Fourth magazine that raises the question of whether Stone had a facelift and suggest it was done by plastic surgeon Dr Stevens California.

The "Basic Instinct" star maintains that such allegations damaged her reputation and hurt her ability to find work. She seeks unspecified damages in the lawsuit, filed Monday in Superior Court.

Neither of the articles cites Calabria as saying he performed the surgery.

Richard Shapiro, a lawyer for Calabria, called the lawsuit "not well thought out," and said, "Dr. Calabria has never told anyone that he has performed surgery on Sharon Stone."

Shame

Stone alleges that Calabria or his associates contacted the magazines and that such statements tended to expose her "to shame and ridicule and subsequent damages others to flee in shame from association ... or dealing with (her)."

"Sharon Stone has a reputation for her natural beauty and glamour," according to the lawsuit. "While she certainly respects others' choice to do so, Sharon Stone has never undergone a face-lift in order to improve her physical appearance."

THE ACTRESS says she was "ridiculed."

The 46-year-old actress also accuses Calabria of painting the kind of slurs felt by someone who is "beaut" of his purported professional relationship with her.

Stevens said Calabria put the articles on the Web site because they highlight a particular kind of slow felt by someone.

"He has a right to choose any articles that reference his name and his practice," Stevens said. AP

PRECIOUS MEMORIES. Divina's kneeling on Dranreb. FPJ's yuotable: "The voice of the people is the voice of God."

Divina Valencia comes home for FPJ

By Mel Valera

DIVINA Valencia, the '50s screen siren with the Veronica Lake curl over one eye, came home from the US last Thursday to pay her last respects to Fernando Poe Jr., her friend and former co-star.

"He was a good friend of mine," said Divina in Filipino. "He's the godfather of Dranreb [her eldest son by the late actor Bernard Bellosa]. I came back just to see him one last time."

Divina, 76, said she heard the news of FPJ's death at 8 a.m. last Sunday, California time, when a friend of hers called to tell her the news.

"I told my husband, Bobby Quesada, to call up his brother who is coming to FPJ's party Evangelista," Divina recalled. "[Bobby's] brother confirmed that FPJ had died, and I just started to cry."

Divina said that was the first time her husband had seen her cry. She said he urged her to return to Manila.

"So I bought a ticket and flew here the following day," she said.

Long line of love

Divina and Dranreb went to FPJ's wake at the Sto. Domingo Church Thursday night. The former screen icon still sleeps on and had not yet gotten over her jet lag.

She described the long queues of people wake when, like her, wanted to pay their final respect to the man who touched millions of lives.

"You can see from the long line of people who went here to Sto Domingo to see Ronnie that he is loved by the masses," Divina observed. "Not only the masses, but also the others actors who are there to condole with the family. Some of those actors I've dated, but they also came back just to bid Ronnie goodbye."

"You can see from the number of people who are in his wake how much love he gave in his lifetime and left behind. He built up relationships all his life, and he has helped a lot of people without selfishness and without advertising his help. It's only now that you can hear all the good things he had done for other people."

Divina's friendship with FPJ began in 1963 when she became his leading lady in "Madrid sa Capa," for which he won the first of Ronnie four Actor awards (his second was for "Kardo"), according to Divina. The friendship grew stronger after she married Bernard, another actor star who was among FPJ's pows. When Divina gave birth to Dranreb (whose name is a reverse of his father's), new '25, FPJ stood as the boy's grandfather.

Four after Bernard was shot dead in March 1975, Divina kept his friendship with FPJ, describing it as a cushioning factor in her tumultuous life with her husband.

Godfather's role

FPJ took his role as godfather to Dranreb seriously. He sent him to college in the US.

"After Dranreb graduated from high school, FPJ told me that his gift to him was to send him to the US," Divina said.

Dranreb said he last saw FPJ in the US on Sept. 26, 2003.

Asked what his relationship was like with FPJ, the bewitching former child actress said originally, "It's just between me and him."

"There are other people who can say more," Dranreb added. "But sometimes I have of my in using are to previous that maybe, this is not the time to share. Everybody is giving him a tribute so I'm adding a tribute. I respect the man and I respect what he has contributed to society.

"It's a bit belated and it's a bit like adding salt to our wounds because it has been said before, if I simplify this equation: I would say ... vox populi, vox dei [The voice of the people is the voice of God.]"

CNN'S VERONICA PEDROSA

Is Best News Anchor also one of 100 sexiest?

By Irene C. Perez

HONG KONG-BASED Filipino journalist Veronica Pedrosa makes the news on CNN, ranked for media outlet ABS-CBN and GMC, wows for a local newspaper, tonight her Australian boyfriend how to get off a jumping waterfall over her own kids, Imma vs Brit rock bands and confessed she was a "party animal" at Cambridge University.

And she does her own makeup, too.

Pedrosa was recently named The News Anchor in the 2004 Asian Television Awards in Singapore for her work on CNN's "World Sport Asia," a two-hour program she presents with Jerome Sweeny.

In an on-line survey, Pedrosa, 38-year-old mother of two, was also nominated one of the 100 sexiest newscasters.

Of her inclusion among the sexiest, Pedrosa laughed, "A number's a lot," she said. "I'm 99, right?"

"HOW do we make the important compelling?"

Most difficult

"The great challenge for all of us who work in news [is] how do we make the important interesting?," Pedrosa told reporters yesterday in an interview in Makati last Thursday. "How do we make the important compelling?"

"And for us who work for commercial networks, how do we make it so we could make some money? I'm just kidding," she added with a heavy British accent.

The standard of care who has an secretary and who does her own research has covered a number of major global and regional news stories, and interviewed Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, East Timor Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta, New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, Australian Prime Minister John Howard and East Timor President Xanana Gusmao.

But her most difficult interviews, she said, would be of victims, "ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances." These are people, she said, in stressful or traumatic situations who may not appreciate the intrusion of the media and are suspicious of their intentions and should be handled with sensitivity, education and training.

Learning the basics

How's a typical working day at CNN for the year's Best News Anchor?

Pedrosa gets to work at 2 p.m., checks her e-mail and reads wire stories. At 4:30 p.m., staff members and producers assign stories to co-ordinate meeting and prepare a lineup. After deciding on story treatments and gearing up for any breaking news, they go into the preparations for the actual show.

Sometimes, Pedrosa was last home in Manila just last October for her dad's birthday. She visits her family in the Philippines once in the in a year.

Today's even have another passport, which is a pain," she said. "My husband [Cable entertainer Mark Phillips] complains. It takes forever to get a visa-upon-visa!" Phillips dropped by during the interview.

Pedrosa remembered telling her husband, in a British accent, how to get off a jumping waterfall in Manila and hearing to the driver, "Sob! Stop, so." He admitted her, but in his own Australian way.

Journalist by choice

Pedrosa was appointed at age 4 after her mother, an Carmen Navarro Pedrosa, authored a self-all biographer on former First Lady Imelda Marcos that led to their exile to London.

"We were refugees," she said. "My parents were very very active in the exiled opposition. I grew up reading about the human rights abuses in the Philippines since I was 10."

But her mom didn't push her to pursue journalism, and instead wanted for in be a doctor. He would have to be a social worker, though, but then bills have to be paid, she said.

Pedrosa is mother to Gabriel, 8, and Isabel, 2, who are Australian-British citizens and whom she brings with her to Manila. Her 3-11 p.m. schedule allows her to have the mornings with her kids.

Wash and go

She likes television's "The Pete Wing," the novels of Jane Austen, and has just finished "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime" by Mark Haddon.

(On of Brit rock acts Travis and Coldplay are in her playlist, and she also listens to Black Eyed Peas and Hey Coral.

And yes, she does herself up for her CNN show. A consultant checks out her wardrobe and updates her look every now and then, but she takes care of "touch and go" hair, wrestling indomitable straight blow-dryers and hair gomi.

Veronica Pedrosa has come a long way, and aspiring journalists look up to her.

"I can tell already with you guys," she said. "I'm still learning. I just goes on and on. I'm just doing it longer."

Somewhere in the interview, some-

one from home texted her to go

some chick peas from the grocery. "Not sultry," she explained.

She might be a CNN's biggest but she is still Pinoy-at-heart—reporting on a wide range of events, from the biggest live make caught in the flow Bruce Hornsby, and will have time to play with her children and can remain be dinner

"A HUNDRED'S a lot, I'm 99, right?"

LISTEN

2004's top 10 albums

THE TOP 10 albums of the year, according to Associated Press music writer Nekesa Mumbi Moody:

1) "Confessions," Usher. This was the most overplayed, overexposed album of the year—and for love. It's hard to remember when a heartbreaking song served as appealing.

2) "The College Dropout," Kanye West. Though technically a rap album, at its heart, West's stunning debut was every bit and more to songs spoke of struggles of everyday life—from the small to the gargantuan — through gripping lyrics, biting satire and timid "Graduation" video.

3) "Virgin Display: Unreleased Recordings, 1976-1981," Boy Sparx. This sweet collection of the previously lost recordings is a wonderfully orchestrated symphony of funk and soul. Songs like "Sugar" will make you scream dust off your old disco ball (or steal it from your mom's closet).

4) "Rebel Soul Music," Martin Luther. Like the black rock scene itself, Martin Luther—one of its most talented stars—has been producing sizzling music that's gone pretty much unnoticed. The premier cuts are "Growing Pains" and the song "Truth or Dare" are standouts.

5) "One Blood: One Tonight," Lila Downs. Tonight she's known as Mexico's leading lady of song, Downs crafted an album that encompassed all different genres and stealthy influences, with her latest, from blues to even a little rap.

6) "Loaded Jacket," Particle. This jazz band takes you on an unexplainable head trip with their trippy album. By the time the record ends, you'll be sounding another ride.

7) "Shg: Revolutionary But Gangsta," Dead Prez. Like a lot of other artists, Dead Prez put out a record about war in 2004, but it had meaning behind it. They gave us a history lesson, but other compelling, and certainly unconventional, ways to battle back.

8) "Introduce," Brandy. At this point, many of you will surely be saying, "Brandy since out with an album this soon?" Her third disc, Who dis?," came and went faster than her first marriage to Bobby Brown—but this solid pop production work by Timbaland, was surely her best.

9) "The Grey Album," Danger Mouse. Jay-Z and The Beatles. Danger Mouse must be kidding himself right about now. The DJ-producer cleverly mixes the lyrics from Jay-Z's "Black Album" with the music from the Beatles' "White Album" to create the widely-downloaded "The Grey Album," one of the most ingenious mashups to date.

10) "Funky Wolves," Jem. Yes, this British import does sound awful bit like fellow UK-singer Joss Stone, but there's no way she's not her listed more female voices from the alternative music scene, Jem's was the strongest. AP

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OPINION

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Bias

PERCEPTIONS have their own reality. This is what we must remember when we take the measure of a Filipino icon like Fernando Poe Jr. It is also what we must keep in mind when we seek to understand his widow's angry and startling accusations of media bias.

The redoubtable Susan Roces did not mince words when she berated the ABS-CBN network for alleged bias in its news coverage. "How to Abominate an ang sama ng loob ko (I will not suppress my bitter feelings)," she said. "People don't want to watch your news coverage because you capitalize on personal hurt," she told Raissa Dawlin, the news anchor of "TV Patrol World."

In such cases involving personal hurt, perceptions harden almost into religious truths. For those who share them, no explanation is necessary; for those who don't, no explanation is possible.

To be sure, Roces did offer an explanation (echoed the next day by opposition leader Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr.). She complained about ABS-CBN's use of "tight shots" during the campaign, which tended to minimize or ignore the size of FPJ's adoring crowds. "You did not show the crowd, you weren't showing the people," she said.

This is a serious accusation, made more so by its specificity. But Roces' outburst was not the first time it was raised. In truth, almost every media organization received this kind of complaint from the Poe camp since the campaign started. It would not be unfair to Poe's media handlers to state bluntly that, instead of yet more questions about Poe's lack of a platform; leading the news stories, they would have preferred photos or footage of the day's crowds.

Certainly, if what Roces meant was that *ABS-CBN did* not give the Poe presidential campaign the Erap treatment, she would be completely in the right. The television network that has helped elect several senators and at least one vice president did not cover Poe this year the way it covered his bosom buddy Joseph Estrada from the 1998 election right up to the disposed president's impeachment trial in 2000.

This makes ABS-CBN a victim of its own past practices.

But there were to be more times during this year's campaign that the network was thought to be biased for FPJ.

Let us cite only one instance. The first major crisis the Poe campaign confronted was the series of disqualifications cases filed against the candidate; any propaganda value from the cases, however, was quickly countered by an even more sensational allegation: that the incriminating documents against Poe were injectedly forged by a group under the direction of Ricardo Manapat, the director of the National Archives then.

In the Senate hearings conducted and then hurriedly concluded by Poe supporter Sen. Edgardo Angara, employees of the National Archives emerged to serve as hostile witnesses to Manapat.

ABS-CBN was not remiss in its coverage of both the scandal and the hearings. Here is the point, it did not fail to run favorable stories about the witnesses. The predetermined treatment reached its height when a network reporter followed three witnesses, then under Senate custody, on their triumphant if temporary return to the National Archives. The three were feted at every turn, receiving encouragement from what seemed like the entire agency, from the moment they arrived to the time they left. But why did the witnesses return that particular day? The real answer became clear only at the very end of the report, when the witnesses, waiting at the building's driveway, filed back into an ABS-CBN service vehicle.

A careful viewer would have reached only one conclusion: The witnesses had been brought back to their office, and were now being returned to the theater, by the network itself, for the sake of the story.

But judging from Roces' remarks last week, this instance of anti-Manapat (and thus pro-Poe) coverage is not something Poe's supporters appreciate, or even remember.

And this we come to the blind side of perceptual thinking: we only see what we want or are conditioned to see. We do not remember our neighbor's hundred acts of kindness; we only notice the one unfortunate exchange of words. We do not notice the thousands of policemen doing their duty; we only see the cops who take bribes. That, sadly, is the reality.

People's hope may have died with FPJ

EDITORIAL Malacañang who was terrified by the ghosts of Bataan, the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo is terrified to the dead Fernando Poe Jr. So terrified that it is contradicting itself by dangling the carrot of amnesty to Arthur Lim to pour his grieving, angry family and supporters. First, it offered to make Poe a National Artist for the movies. Then it offered to bury him in the Libingan ng mga Bayani, which is reserved only for our national heroes. Now that it has been made clear that Poe was not accepted, a proposal during the Philippine flag at half-mast, and when told that this cannot be done legally, is proposed giving Poe a Presidential Medal of Merit to make it legal.

The administration is contradicting itself. The National Artist award is limited only to one-time Filipinos, that is why the award is called "National." Likewise, the Libingan ng mga Bayani is reserved only for Filipino heroes. But then one-time naturalized Americans can be citizen FPJ is not a Filipino?

That was in argument in the disqualification case against FPJ, and that was also in argument against FPJ's post-mortem in the Presidential Electoral Tribunal.

What's more, it seeks to repeat the question of FPJ's widow, Susan Roces: What happened to the human *Hamon* who labelled FPJ's birth papers to make it appear that he was not a Filipino? The fellow has been charged with perjury and falsification of public documents a long time ago, but what happened to them cases? Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño says he doesn't have them, and nobody else in the Department of Justice knows where they are. The amount himself cannot be located. Is it also missing? Or has it been "salvaged"?

An indication of the angle of FPJ's foes is what they use to prove the remains are his. By the President and by Speaker Jose de Venecia to Sto. Domingo Church. The President has directed the family to exhume the body and bring it to pay her last respects to her fallen presidential rival, but they were rebuffed. Pres Secretary Ignacio Bunye was earlier sent to the to the mourner. Probably out of sentiment, probably out of seeing all the people who had wronged them during the elections ministering consummation, she lashed out. Particularly at the one TV station she believed had savaged them the most. She did not mince her words, including starred Cinelle to exit. The reason people are not watching ABS-CBN news, she told Dawlin, was not only that is about late but that it was false. Among others, it labelled the attendance in FPJ's campaign. "Why did you say nobody went to the rallies when you could see for yourself the crowds that packed their way there?"

Roces had a good deal more, but it is by now widely known. It was shown in several newscasts that night—among them ABS-CBN—and in the headline of newspapers the next day. She ended on a sentimental note, however, saying if God could forgive, who was she not to?

Well, I myself was wondering how long it would take before she snapped at the sight of all the media that had slammed the door on her husband while he was alive and running to become custodian of Malacañang, but were now panting and shoving to get ahead of the line when her husband waited to occupy the cold vault. Where the silent crowds, that was a real sign of epic proportions, and FPJ's widow passed it with flying colors. The voices of grief and anger. Whether contemplative or explosive, she looked consistently presidential.

That is as particularly if we define "presidential" by the two characteristics that should attend it but has been stripped from it in these past years: honesty. Honesty in the one thing that has been deified instrumentals in this country, long becoming a hallmark of presidencies of yesteryear.

It is said that the Filipinos are a patient people. Because they always cling to hope—even the poorest of the poor and the desperate among them—to quit cannot die through. FPJ was a beacon of hope. Just as he was huge persona. Just in the movies where he was the hero who always came in the nick of time and triumphed in the end against villains. And he was a hero to them not only in the movies but also in real life. With his death, the people's hope of deliverance from oppression, injustice and poverty also died. Without hope, people mourn in rock, loss and dangerous events, like the smoke who try to take with death to hell in spite of their supposed sacrifices in this regard.

All these cannot be lost on the administration. I am sure they are discussing this at Malacañang. Which explains all the efforts at appeasement.

The FPJ's remarks know he government is trying to appease them but they are not biting. Appeasement is not the same as sincerity. In the same way that a sinner cannot be forgiven unless he confesses his sins and sincerely repents. A promise cannot be given sincerely unless he admits his crimes. People want sincerity from the administration.

* * *

If you still have not finished your Christmas shopping, here is a last-and-easy way to do it. Buy gift items for those left to pity.

Give the "gift of life" to your friends by donating, in their names, to the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS). By donating a minimum of P100 to PAWS, a will send a "Gift of Life" card to your friend announcing that you have donated, in his name, to the shelter. You can visit PAWS' Animal Rehabilitation Center (ARC) in Metro Rizal, Antipolo City, or the box of the Tower going to Gardens.

For inquiries or visit unique Christmas gift, you can call PAWS at 415-5000.

Susan for president

SUSAN Roces' gave our two interviews last week that showed a contrast in minds. Both made me wonder what moderate personnel Fernando Poe Jr is standing to make the task ahead. Only the campaign manager, Susan, and his wife away from the inner session public forums. I don't know how to interview FPJ's, but Susan Roces is obviously so.

The interviews during the past week should make everyone shudder at the thought that Susan is a participant in supreme thoughts and feelings. There are no flamboyant languages, there are only flamboyant speakers. Roces rose to heights of eloquence completely effortlessly during her interviews starting in Tagalog, "what is the point of saying what has something else to say?"

In the first interview, Roces was gracious to the extreme.

Yes, she said, she was still going to float on this Christmas. That is how it has always been with her. She has been in so many floating and battered early in life to make the best of what she had. When they were kids, every time someone in her family had a birthday and they didn't have money, they just bought a piece of cake. Then their family met to get a candle on it. We don't still celebrate Christmas. Her husband wasn't in where physically, but he'll still be there in spirit. She'll make the best of what she has.

FPJ, she said, never misrepresented himself when he was for president. He never painted himself off as someone other than what he was. He was a school dropout who has to the top of his profession through talent and hard work. He was a man with a good heart who had helped others before and wanted to help others. Roces reiterated like that most people who need their hands only to appreciate them.

She thought the crowd that saw to decide the winner was by President Macapagal-Arroyo were wrong to do so. But she had no dominion over people's hearts. Her husband himself had been much affected by what happened in the elections. Someone is robbed of his money, he can always make it another day. Someone is robbed of his dreams, he is robbed of his life.

In the second interview, Roces was furious to

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

the max. Yesterday was Christmas, probably the most anticipated holiday in the country. Instead of being a time of joy, it was a time of sorrow. Instead of being a time of peace, it was a time of anger. Instead of being a time of love, it was a time of hate. Instead of being a time of hope, it was a time of despair. Instead of being a time of faith, it was a time of doubt. Instead of being a time of unity, it was a time of division. Instead of being a time of forgiveness, it was a time of revenge. Instead of being a time of reconciliation, it was a time of conflict. Instead of being a time of healing, it was a time of wounds. Instead of being a time of rebirth, it was a time of death. Instead of being a time of resurrection, it was a time of crucifixion.

It is said that the Filipinos are a patient people. Because they always cling to hope—even the poorest of the poor and the desperate among them—to quit cannot die through. FPJ was a beacon of hope. Just as he was huge persona. Just in the movies where he was the hero who always came in the nick of time and triumphed in the end against villains. And he was a hero to them not only in the movies but also in real life. With his death, the people's hope of deliverance from oppression, injustice and poverty also died. Without hope, people mourn in rock, loss and dangerous events, like the smoke who try to take with death to hell in spite of their supposed sacrifices in this regard.

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* * *

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For inquiries or visit unique Christmas gift, you can call PAWS at 415-5000.

Legacy from KC's tragic death

WHEN the residence of Speaker Jose de Venecia in Dasmariñas Village burned down, trapping his youngest daughter Ellen Sarmiento, some 20 members of the House of Representatives rushed there upon hearing the news. One of the endless to arrive was Bukidnon Rep. Miguel Zubiri. I had a chance to chat with him at the wake for KC in Cagayan de Oro City on Dec. 23. Zubiri recounted what the Speaker had stressed to the media: The firefighting units that responded to the emergency were woefully inadequate in terms of equipment.

* * *

JDV had stressed that Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay was so helpful to them in trying to rescue KC. Binay joined the De Venecias in their desperate moments as they tried to enter the burning house, bearing the extreme heat and flames. But they had to retreat as the fire engulfed the entire house. JDV tried a third time with the firemen, but again he was unable to ascend the heat; by that time the ceiling of the house and the wooden second floor had caved in. Later JDV assured to the media that if the Makati Fire Department had only more extendable extra ladders for the firemen, his daughter might have been saved.

* * *

Zubiri noted that the AFP, supposedly the most modern in the country, doesn't have even a single helicopter unit. It has no ambulance (only one good mader), no state-of-the-art rescue and air-lift facilities. In fact, the firemen had to borrow floodlights from a TV crew. Because of inadequate equipment, the firefighters had to rely on instinct as the heat from the gutted residence which was engulfed in flames, instead of cutting through the grills at the side of the room where the girl was. JDV also observed that the fire trucks would run out of water and then wait for the local water to fill that water. Because, every moment counted in saving his daughter.

* * *

The report of such inadequacy is simply appalling. As of this to the cases with the firefighters of Makati, the richest city in the country, one can imagine how the other fire teams in other places are. Another Eddie Villanueva, who came to pray over the De Venecia couple and other members of their child, a resident of thousands of people in a fabulous municipality watched helplessly as six children burned inside a house because the firemen couldn't get through the grilled windows. But Makati, where the biggest taxpayers are located, has no excuse in not having the latest fire-fighting equipment and technology. Let's hope Mayor Binay would fit his firefighters with first-class and ultramodern equipment, so that Makati's fire team would also help nearby towns and cities that cannot afford them.

* * *

Tragedy that befell JDV's daughter and his residence has highlighted the need for more modern fire-fighting equipment. the Speaker told the media (though he said it happily as the fire in his residence was said to have originated from an electronic cartridge for fighting mosquitoes). JDV also uses a cane, says to the nation's families to observe an accident-free holiday season by using Christmas lights in a safer manner. He said that he intends to allocate some P15 million in the next year's national budget to equip at least each city a couple of extendo units. The House members who witnessed the tragedy in Dasmariñas Village last Thursday night urged the Speaker to make the unanimous resolution for fire-fighting equipment KC's legacy.

* * *

The tragedy that befell JDV's family drew sympathy from various leaders of the country who cast aside political and ideological lines to condole with them. Those included Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye, Presidential Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales and Senate President Franklin Drilon.

Political Tidbits

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

Senators Nene Pimentel, Loi and Jinggoy Estrada and Big Bertie Ejercito, as well as MNLF Chief Nur Misuari. Iraqi also called his former rival. Messages of sympathy also poured from abroad—from Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai. JDV spent endless hours in Belgium the new for US secretary general in 2006. Here, going his own ambition to run for that coveted post), Cambodian Senate President Heng Samrin, Indonesian Vice President Hamzah Haz, Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Penang and Kedah Governors Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon and Datuk Seri Osman Aziz, Malaysian Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Ching, and Indonesian Speaker Chaidhir Anwar Tanjung.

* * *

On the other hand, the classmates of KC at Colegio San Agustin and International School gathered old photos of KC and put up an instant memorial/altar at the hallways de San Antonio, where they often sang at the Masses. Neptali Gonzales and Lorna Lacuesta, wife of another Sen. Serge Lacuesta, both came with old paintings of KC that they had bought at KC's one-girl painting exhibit eight years ago. KC's mom, Gina, is trying to buy some of these paintings back. Photos of KC's classmates at the wake, including Ambassador Lourdes Yparraguirre and Ramon Ang and some photos of KC that were enlarged from the fire.

* * *

Showing resilience, JDV, during the wake, pointed out that while he was wearing that evening the same clothes that he had on when he rushed to the fire. He said his shoes were from Rep. Angelo Aldaba, his pants from Rep. Teddy Boy Locsin. (who also donated many disposable briefs to JDV), his polo barong was reviewed from his colleagues in Pangasinan province, while his wife, Amy, is dressed of pajamas. Hearing JDV's story humbled Rep. Al Francis quipped that the Speaker is the original recipient of relief goods from Congress. People go to Batong magkaroon (You can give me more donations)." Besides quoted, and JDV replied, "Pag-ibigan na nga ako eh (Oh, nakapagasawa ka ulit)." (Love and faith, I'll accept.)

'Novedades'

Commentary

Miss Conception A. Antonio
Assistant to Chanel and Hotel Suites

"NOVEDADES (ang pronunciation)" kept ringing in my ear for the last couple of days. As early as November, our Spanish professor at Instituto Cervantes had been telling me about the schools' Christmas novedades on Dec. 6. Its translation to all to-mean, And the big noise on was the great pot of paella which everyone would eat during a celebration before the school closed for the holiday season.

Dec. 6, however, came and no paella was cooked. There wasn't much celebration either. Except for the lovely Christmas tree by the stairs and the Nativity figurines standing nearby were not very telling me "it's Christmas!" the day still went by without that certain Christmassy feeling. Classes went on as usual, uninterrupted. Many students I spoke to were not aware that Dec. 6 was the day that the activity had been cancelled. I even heard one girl in the corridor saying that she had looked forward to the festivity and had even invited her friends over to eat and when they got there and found nothing, she had to usher them out empty-handed.

My professor said that the administration had decided to use the money for the great paella to help the victims of the recent catastrophe instead.

It was the first of a number of Christmas parties that I had to miss celebrating.

The following week, I received news that Christmas parties of NGOs and other institutions at the Social Development Complex in Antioch had also been cancelled or, if not, made simpler by using a portion of their party budget to give food packs to families in Quinos, Wawa Feliz and Bicutan.

Our organization joined this act of solidarity. Instead of going to Cubao-plex for our scheduled Christmas party and 20th anniversary celebration, we decided to just hold a simple gathering at our conference room so we could give most of the budget as donations to families in evacuation camps in Quezon. Aside from this, the enormous amount for the exchange gifts was reduced from P300 to P200, with the P100 added instead to the donations fund.

The University of Santo Tomas followed a few days ago, at what my sister-in-law insists, I could see disappointment written on her face. She told me there wouldn't be any fireworks for the "Pasalubong" this year. My sister said I have always loved this grand fireworks display which opens the university with Christmas celebration. On weeks would after after basking up for 8 to 10 minutes, unraveling at the bright colors decorating the dark, ashen sky.

But not even a flare was seen on "Pasalubong" night this Christmas season. The budget for fireworks this year was instead used to buy relief goods for storm families. Thinking of the word Dane fireworks cost three days, I'd say a lot of families really benefited from this decision.

This Christmas has been stripped of its red ribbons, candy canes, decorative angels, silver bells and other things that generally give a festive atmosphere to the season. I spent the evening inside three stores all away or the flood rumors caused by the four typhoons carried them away along with the many roads of Southern Luzon.

For the past few weeks, I have fasted through the newspapers, read reports about the storm's aftermath and looked at the pictures that accompanied these stories. After so many tragedies and catastrophes at this country which have claimed thousands of lives, one would think he/she should get used to seeing death. But I guess that will only happen on the day one stops being human. So as I beheld these victims of people weeping over the loved ones they lost in the heavy rains, of kids shivering in the cold, their skin, wet garments and hair, I felt my heart sink. My throat became wrecked and clobbered in frustration. I shivered, felt scared and sorry for the grief that struck the nation.

But recently as I went over the papers again, the pictures have changed. Yes, they are still showing the faces of the victims, but I couldn't help but see marked difference was that they were smiling. The surprise captured the flicker of hope in their eyes as they stretched out their arms and reached for the bags of relief goods. One wore to black and white, I have to say the magnificent flashes of smiles.

Thinking about giving up those fancy Christmas parties, it dawned on me that it meant fewer gifts under the Christmas tree or simpler food on the table for Noche Buena. But then again it also means sharing the food and gifts with those who have lost everything. It may be a small gift or food share on that big pan of paella, I would like to believe that the whole country's poor community affected by the storm is now taking part in a grandeur set-up.

I would also like to think that when the storm has passed, when floods and debris have ebbed, all of it is really took away were the destructions. Now stripped bare and naked, we see that Christmas celebrated for what it is really all about: sincere love.

Presidential Medal of Merit

The Long View

Manuel L. Quezon III

WHAT is the Presidential Medal of Merit? It is one of the national honors awarded in the form of orders and decorations by the Philippine President, Congress or government. These orders and decorations are: the Quezon Service Cross, conferred by the President of the Philippines; the Order of Gabriela Silang, for the promotion of women's rights; the Order of Lakandula, for political and civic merit; the Order of Sikatuna, for the upholding of the rule of law; and the Order of Solidarity, the Order of National Scientists, and the Order of National Social Scientists, for those who have been proclaimed as such; the Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan for the National Living Treasures; the Order of Gabriela Silang

For commuters' sake

LETTERS

Traffic issues is particularly interested for the Land Transportation Office and the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board.

A couple of days ago, I took a jeepney in the Alabang Metropolis public transport terminal on my usual morning route to the Food Terminal Inc. in Taguig. Somewhere and sometime after we had arrived from the Batasan Hills/Sandiganbayan and commuter alert we had arrived from the Batasan Hills/Sandiganbayan and commuter alert we had arrived from the Batasan Hills/Sandiganbayan and commuter alert

Across the NATION

LITTLE angels join the annual Christmas tree lighting at the Baguio Country Club.

Parents storm pre-need educational plan office

DIGNO CITY—Agitated by the seeming breakdown of "assurance" from the College Assurance Plan (CAP), parents of scholars of the pre-need educational plan stormed its regional office here Friday to demand explanation and even payment.

The same following the receipt of a letter from San Pedro College (SPC) management, a premier Catholic-run private school here, advising the parents to settle their accounts for the second semester of the school year which was supposed to have been shouldered by their CAP investors.

The Ateneo de Davao University and the Davao Doctors College also earlier refused to accept CAP checks, and required their students with CAP scholarship to pay instead.

The problem was resolved with the school-making the responsibility of paying with the assurance that CAP will refund their payments.

But the tensions burned that some students have not been reimbursed the money due them.

In the letter, signed by SPC president Sr. Aida Tronsillo, parents of CAP scholars were required to pay their accounts pending availability of CAP funds in order not to jeopardize the operation of the school.

Apparently, CAP Philippines failed to pay for the enrollment, even the down payments, of their scholars one school in DPC.

The letter also indicated that the insurance company also failed to "fulfill its promise to pay the accounts of CAP scholars for the first semester of school year 2004-2005."

Tronsillo also said that all checks issued by CAP-Philippines for the first semester payments of CAP scholars bounced twice due to insufficiency of funds.

Tronsillo said they were left with no choice but to ask the CAP scholars themselves to pay for their school accounts by January next year. The bank accounts will be collected in three equal installments from January to March 2005.

"Our pending account is around P3,000 to P17,000 for the preliminary exams . . . and we are being asked to pay it by January CAP should settle this immediately or we suffer the risk/s of paying it," a parent said.

"We are also afraid that this could affect the education of our children," another parent said.

But CAP through its account manager Norberto Belmonte, account manager, said the company have available funds to pay for the pending accounts of their scholars.

She said they were still waiting for their dues from the P118 million funds to be released by the CAP head office in Manila.

The P118 million is intended for all the CAP scholars nationwide but the money will not be released in full. She said the CAP national office would release the money in P65-million scheme.

The branch also learned that the CAP regional office here has a pending account of P35 million for all its schools in the region alone.

Belmonte said CAP would implement a "first come, first serve" scheme for the payment.

"We are doing our best here to follow up and solve the problem. Arjhay Tupaz, PIA/Kidapawan Bureau

DAR orders power firm to stop developing orchard farm in Aklan

By Rocel L. Vidal
PDI Visayas Bureau

IMLIBO, Aklan—The Department of Agrarian Reform promulgated of fice has ordered Mirant Power Corp. to stop developing the 2.8-hectare orchard farm as a site of their diesel-fed 5-megawatt power plant in Barangay Mabilo, New Washington town.

The cease and desist order (CDO) was issued on Dec. 10 and was signed by Lawyer Daniel Mariñelena, Provincial Agrarian Reform Officer II.

Mariñelena told Mirant and its subsidiary Toledo Holdings to stop developing the area within ten days from the receipt of the CDO.

He warned that failure to comply with the order would compel the DAR to file criminal charges against the respondents for violating Republic Act 6657 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law on the "permanent conversion" of agricultural lands to industrial uses.

It was learned that Mirant failed to file an application for conversion with the DAR office here since it commenced its power plant project in June 2004 despite a previous CDO issued by the DAR.

One of the violations found by DAR during its investigation was a land transfer transaction between its former owner Cristina Reyes and the Toledo holdings.

"The land used in making of property questionable since it has been registered with the Registry of Deeds even without a clearance from DAR as mandated by the DAR administrative order no. 1 series of 1989. This is an administrative offense. In other words, it has not gone through the usual process," said lawyer Cecil Mendiz, chief legal division of DAR-Aklan.

Documents showed that Reyes issued a special power of attorney in favor of lawyer Genaventa Peñalba who executed a deed of absolute sale to Toledo Holdings. The lawyer is a daughter of Mayor Reynaldo Peñalba of New Washington.

Mendiz told the Inquirer that the land transfer was registered at the Registry of Deeds on April 8 and was approved by Fiscal Lourdes Dumpit Mayor under TCT no. 5432. Acorn land title was issued to Toledo holding on the same day.

He said the second violation was the alleged "illegal conversion" of the power plant, which was now about 80 percent completed, because it had no approval from the DAR.

He pointed out that Mirant also did not apply for conversion when it started building the power plant in the orchard farm.

The lessees insisted that as early as May 3, the DAR had asked Mirant to stop developing the area since it had not obtained any clearance from the DAR but the latter ignored it and continued to bring in heavy equipment like into the project site.

Adrian Mercado, assistant vice president of Mirant Global Corp., told Roby that his concerns had well been noted and was assured that Mirant would comply with all the requirements for the application for conversion.

Micro-finance agencies tapped to help farmers

By Norman Bordadora

LUPAO Before becoming those Villa has tapped the services of 16 micro-finance institutions to help farmer-beneficiaries under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program to augment their income and eliminate those from selling or pawning their farmland benefits.

Villa said that farmer-beneficiaries must have other sources of livelihood to resist the temptation of pawning or selling their farmlands if only to meet their needs while waiting for harvests to come.

"The lack of alternative sources of [livelihood] forces some farmer-beneficiaries to pawn their lands. In most occasions, the farmers fail to recover their lands because of excessive interest rates," Villa said.

The Department of Land Reform last week launched the Microfinance Industries Project, or Microcat.

"Microcat offers small loans to farmer-beneficiaries, which they could use as starting capital for their small businesses. Average amount of loan each farmer can apply is P6,750," he said.

Villa said that while Microcat is not a quick-fix solution to the livelihood issues of farmer-beneficiaries, it could help make farmers herself/himself resist the temptation and dissuade them from pawning their lands.

Villa said 16 micro-finance institutions accredited by the People's Credit and Finance Corp. (PCFC) are involved in the project.

The PCFC will be the lead wholesale lending institution, while the 16 lending institutions will provide micro-financing to the farmer-beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries to the project are agrarian reform communities in 17 provinces that are under the coverage of the Agrarian Reform Communities Development Project II (ARCDP2), a foreign-assisted project under the auspices of the Pantil Bank.

The provinces are Batanes, Isabela, Zambales, Bataan, Tarlac, Quezon, Occidental Mindoro and Albay in Luzon, Negros Oriental and Bohol in the Visayas, and Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, Compostela Valley, Misamis Occidental and Zamboanga del Norte in Mindanao.

The DAR-ARCDP2 has committed P15 million to the project to subsidize salaries of frontline staff of the micro-finance institutions and to provide logistics and mobility support.

ILOCOS SUR'S NEST
The well-known products of Ilocos Sur, such as tobacco, jars, cribs, garlic and others, are hung on this Christmas tree in front of the provincial capitol.

City probes Baguio water project

BAGUIO CITY—The city council is investigating a bulk water supply project here, after receiving confirmation from the city's water utility, Mawasa, that it will need to raise P66 million a month to pay the winning contractor.

Teresita de Guzman, general manager of the Baguio Water District (BWD), said the P66 million monthly fee was computed against the contractor's expenditures in pumping water from reservoirs located outside the city.

She declined to estimate the potential water rate increase that BWD would need to fulfill this contract, but a consumer group said Baguio water prices could shoot up three times higher than the average rate of P29.90 per cubic meter of water.

De Guzman said the BWD earns no more than P20 million a month from water sales because it services only 65 percent of Baguio's 200,000 residents.

She said BWD can only generate 25,000 cubic meters of water a day to address a daily demand of 82,000 cubic meters of water, but the daily demand by 2010 could rise from 100,000 to 150,000 cubic meters.

To wage, the city lifestyle has adapted to a water-rationing and water-cutting routine since 1998.

De Guzman said that by constructing a bulk water supplies walk-in current water distribution system, BWD would be able to supply all areas of the city from eight to 12 hours a day.

The Baguio bulk water supply project was started in 1997 to mitigate rare decades of water rationing here. The project's lone bidder is Benguet Corp., the country's oldest mine firm, which plans to convert one of its largest open pit mines in Itogon, Benguet, into a reservoir.

Benguet Corp. has acquired water rights to at least 50 water resources in Itogon.

Leopoldo Sison, Benguet Corp. bulk water project manager, asked the council to exclude the firm from the public since the bidders had no influence in the way the bulk water project was designed.

Benguet Corp. was not a party to any water contract because the final stage of the bulk water supply bidding process required an evaluation of the firm's financial offer, Sison said.

Benjamin Philip Romualdez, Benguet Corp. president, said Baguio residents would actually save money because rate for water. He said household supplement their rationed water by buying 12 to 20 drums of water from deep well operators and water delivery firms, in violation of BWD's franchise.

Residents have spend an average of P1,220 per delivery of water. Five of these water delivery firms are registered, De Guzman told the council.

"We are actually providing these truckers sufficient competition because we are offering 50,000 cubic meters of water each day for P40 or lower for every cubic meter of water (fluid) on a rolling provided by BWD's bid versus of tobacco," Romualdez said.

The BWD's pre-qualification bids and awards committee had already disqualified Benguet Corp. in July over questions about the quality of its water source.

But the BWD board of directors reversed the decision in October after Romualdez presented the findings and after the Local Water Utilities Administration officially intervened.

Some councilors questioned the propriety of these interventions because of their impact on BWD's track record with bulk water supply projects.

BWD had first awarded the bulk water supply contract to a winning bidder in 1997, but the first pullout out when the Asian currency crisis affected the economy.

Mayor Bernardo Vergara has been pushing for a revision of the bulk water supply project, after citing evidence that Baguio's high rainfall average each year could be a sufficient source for water.

Sessions said BWD should explore cheaper alternatives that would not require the city to buy water from other towns. These schemes include harnessing smaller water rivers to impound and treat run-off rainwater. Hector Cabrera and Dennis Deveciilla, PIA Northern Luzon bureau

Landslide survivor sees bleak prospects for siblings

HAGA CITY—Like a thief in the night, death came and claimed eight lives in Sitambac, Camarines Sur, while everyone was in deep sleep.

It's the wee hours of the morning on Sunday, Dec. 12, the continuous downpour that started a day earlier finally unleashed its deadly force that subjected a hill along the national highway, crushing several houses as the landslide debris settled on the lower portion of the area.

Alvin Segovia, 17, who lost both his parents and his three younger siblings during the landslide, could not comprehend how it happened even as he had heard about the bigger tragedy in Real, Quezon.

Segovia said that without premonition or sign of danger, he and his family were lulled to sleep at about 8 p.m., as the downpour continued.

"It was so sudden that I woke up only some villagers were already pulling me out of the rubble down the rice fields at about three in the morning," he said.

Segovia, his brothers Ismael, 1, Ryan, 2, and sister Ivy, 9, suffered only minor bruises while his brother Ariel, 14, broke his leg.

His parents, Ariel, 46, and Veronica, 37, and three other children—Jason, 15, Frances, 11, and Jacob, 7, were not as lucky.

Responsibility

Having blankly on a hospital bed with his brother Ariel, he had no idea how he could survive after the tragedy, now that the responsibility of raising the Segovia siblings rests on his shoulders.

"I have finished only my elementary education and I am planning to continue my high school education next summer. But how can I do it," Segovia asked.

He said their house, which was made of light materials, once stood just before a hill with sparse coconut trees. The hill collapsed after rain typhoons passed by the province and the toll was bounced by the continuous downpour on Saturday.

Segovia, whose parents came from the neighboring province of Albay, had been waiting for assistance from his relatives a day after the tragedy happened.

He could not take care of all the needs of his other siblings remaining in the hospital.

Camarines Sur Gov. Luis Raymund Villafuerte Jr. extended immediate financial assistance to the Segovia family and the other victims of the tragedy.

He said he had already directed his office to extend scholarship grants to the Segovia siblings and ordered the rehabilitation of the area.

Possible relocation

He said he had also directed the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council to further identify populated areas near the hillsides along the highways for possible relocation.

Villafuerte said the provincial government would also review the disaster response plans of communities in order to avoid unexpected incidents like the tragedy that happened in Sitambac town. Joan Bacomler Jr., PIA Southern Luzon bureau

Allies in the Visayas mourn death of 'Da King'

CEBU CITY—Friend and political allies of Reinerio Paz Jr. in the Visayas joined the nation in expressing grief and sorrow over his death, especially since his electoral protest has yet to be resolved.

Former Bohol Gov. Erico Aristotle Aumentado said the death of Paz left hanging his quest for justice in his electoral protest case.

Aumentado, who was Paz's provincial vice-mayoral bearer in the last election, said Paz's protest was not only intended to prove that he won the election but more importantly to lead to the prosecution of those who make a mockery of the people's mandates.

"I pity him. He died a frustrated man," added Tagbilaran City Mayor Dan Lim.

Lim, who was said now under the Nacionalista Party, Manny Pacquiao of ex-President Joseph Estrada, said Paz came out of his comfort zone to offer himself in the service of the Filipino people but was failed to materialize when the votes were counted.

Negros Oriental Rep. Emilio C. Macias II, meanwhile, surmised it would still be premature to be thinking of politics, especially talking about Paz's supposed political successor.

He said he did not believe that Gov. Edgardo Angara was speaking for the LDP when the latter was quoted as saying that Paz's wife, actress Jaime Bianca, may be drafted to lead the opposition.

Macias said the Nacionalista People's Coalition, of which he is a member, has yet no intent in the province he manages.

Other supporters of the late mayor were still in shock over his death.

"We have lost a leader and many of us are demoralized," said Bonie Cadarasan, National President of the Filipinos for Peace, Justice and Progress Movement (FPJPM).

He said he does not see anyone among the opposition leaders who could match Paz's "sincerity to help and serve the people."

The group, which claims to have six million members, supported Paz's failed presidential bid in the May elections.

Cadarasan said Paz's opposition from another area opposite from Cebu City and Northern Negros would come to the late actor man's wake and burial set on Dec. 31.

He said the wake was for Mr. "Amen" with the view also of his electoral protest pending before the Presidential Electoral Tribunal (PET), which is now headed by the Supreme Court.

The FPJPM last month launched a signature campaign calling for the fairest resolution of the protest. Cadarasan said they planned to gather one million signatures by late January or February next year.

"Pero wala sa mga resources whether to continue the campaign, said Cadarasan, saying they will discuss it after Pat's burial.

"Even if he has passed away, we all want to prove who really won the electoral," said Cadarasan.

Paz, who lost to President Macapagal-Arroyo by 1.1 million votes in the official canvass, claimed the President cheated him in the May election.

Mayor Rosalia Pendatun of Datu Saudul, Negros Occidental said a great injustice had been done to a "deserving president" of the country. "It's time for the people to rise, to solidly pray for the restoration of the right democracy and to continue the legacy of FPJ," he said.

In Dumaguete City, Ed Aranda, FPJ Movement Negros chair, asked the supporters and fans of Paz to accept his death with open arms and hearts. "I personally believe

that no one knows that he is more with the Lord than in [illegible] and eternal existence," he said.

"I appeal for continuous prayers for FPJ and his family to [illegible] strong to accept the will of God," Aranda said.

"Let us also not attack politics in the death of FPJ like attacking President Arroyo. It is not good. They should not put political color into the death of FPJ but accept the will of God," he said.

"The atmosphere in the entire province is so gloomy and sad," said Negros Junior Gov. Raul Ilanz, the Mayor rang Pagkakaisang Pilipino (NPP) in Eastern Negros.

Paz was overwhelmingly in Northern Samar against closest rival President Macapagal.

Ilanz described Paz as a man of "courage" who "brought happiness to the Filipino people, specially the masses through the films he starred, directed and produced."

"I am sad. Knowing him as a decent person whose only intention was to serve the people, I can say that he is a great loss to our country," said former Cebu City Mayor Osmeña, who met and had lunch with Paz in his mayoral bid in the last elections under Pat's ticket.

Leandro Ray Lim Buhlingkang, a radio and anger-theme writer and director in Cebu who claimed the FPJ films on Labor were [illegible] in the last elections, urged their different leaders in the Visayas to organize a Mass in their respective places for the eternal repose of Pat's soul.

Bonded Mayor Celso Lavinandao, another political ally of the late Pat, said Pat would always have a place in the hearts of the people whose lives he touched. "Even during his brief stint as governor in the province, he commendable good deeds will be noticed. [illegible] were much longer. Testimonies from people who benefited from the good [illegible] of his golden heart are too many to count, because Ramon not only gave from what he had, he gave of himself."

To give tribute to a "warrior and great man," former Mayor Alvin Garcia, who was the Cebu City mayor under Pat's Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP), initiated the celebration of a mass at 6 p.m. tonight at the Cebu Metropolitan Cathedral.

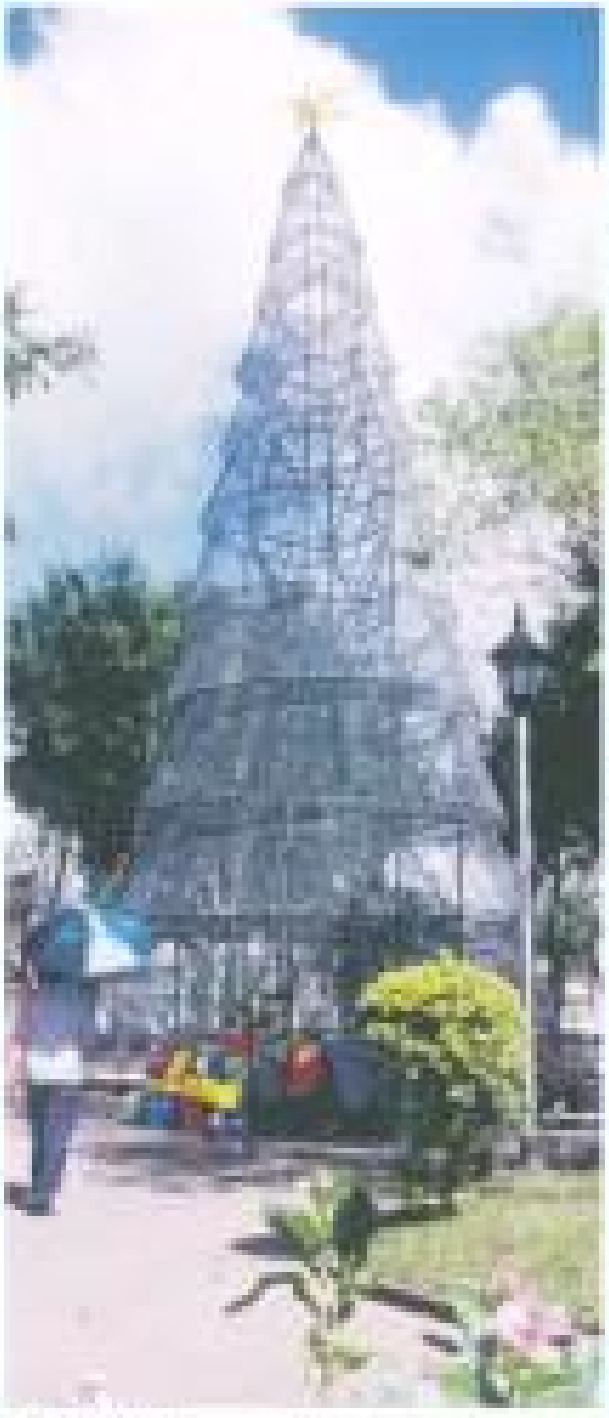
Garcia said he had contacted Pat's supporters and fans in the area to attend the mass. "It is just a small [illegible] with various great persons," he said the bygones.

The FPJ Fans in Leyte already offered a mass last Thursday at the Capitol Parish Church in Cebu City, said Leandro "Boy" Buhlingkang, the group's coordinator in Central Visayas.

Buhlingkang said that after the mass which was attended by about 200 persons, they launched a caravan of musicians, expressing their support and sympathy to the bereaved family.

He added the mourners were initiated by the Studios, cousin of FPJP defeated gubernatorial candidate Ford Studios, and would be published in the local newspapers.

Tomorrow, Buhlingkang, former Land Transportation Office regional director Manuel Lang and Ford Studio will fly to Manila to attend the wake of Pat and then the funeral on Wednesday. (Dan Fuentes, Abe Ali, Jay Galleta, Nestor Burgos Jr., Ramon Magallanes and Carlo Gomez, PDI Pearse Baraso)



ONE OF A KIND
This Christmas tree made of steel, about 15 meters high and the only one of its kind in Bicol, is adorned with 5,000 multicolored lights.

Group wants end to Igorot begging

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

BAGUIO CITY—"We all" is a new catchword to know during the holidays, when elderly beggars from the Cordillera Peoples Rights Alliance (CPRA) and Metro Manila.

Lyn Madaleng, executive director of gender rights advocacy group Bagani Sa, supplied baskets to Baguio Gen. Hospital wood, meaning "nothing," but it's also handy for Metro Manila folk who are often approached by Cordillera beggars walking into a mall "in the spirit of Christmas."

Elderly die some Cordilleras will be needed as agent to assist workers before Christmas, but not before they have enough to carry enough to live on for a month, said Madaleng.

"And it has to stop," she said.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development has about given up on indigenous Filipinos who visit Metro Manila during Yuletide season, reported to by province.

Last year, the DSWD returned 32 beggars to the Cordillera. The number was a big increase from the six Mt. Province elders who are known to frequent Metro Manila during the holidays, said Mandy Ramos, officer in charge of the DSWD Cordillera Crisis Intervention Unit.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority declared these as off-season in 2002, she said. "It was no treatment for them, but it didn't stop the wave of beggars from the Cordillera," Ramos said.

The DSWD in Metro Manila has also struggled to contain Badjao and Aeta beggars, because they come in clans during the winter season.

But the increase in the number of Cordillera beggars is worried considering that Ramos and Bagabo villages in Mt. Province have taken rules against begging, said Madaleng.

"A hungry family in Mt. Province will never beg for food from a neighbor. It's not how we are raised," she said.

Worse, the phenomenon is robbing elderly women, the very people who are expected to remember the community's history and protect their rituals, she said.

"Women have engaged other (Cordillera) tribes in arguments about begging. As Bagio—one challenged Tony Ramos). Bra Langid (two former beggars have shamed the whole Igorot community and (Langid) kept pretending that [beggars for Mt. Province] wouldn't do that," Madaleng said.

Both government and academic surveys, however, confirm this accusation, she said.

Ramos said much of their data have not been validated because beggars deny interview "what to withhold us."

But the Mt. Province village government was referred to as the same villages evacuated down by Typhoon Yolanda (Nina). In an independent women's development study at the University of the Philippines.

DSWD is monitoring the villages of Mabalo, Bulo, Cadaclan, and Maligcong in Bontoc town, and the villages of Palaspas, Tadian, Dalican and Talubtub in Sagada town.

Madaleng said some of these villagers are themselves discriminated by fellow Mt. Province folk.

"They are the backward of the backward (villages). There are no roads, there is no government presence," she said.

"In fact, I suspect that other have hesitated into begging using the names of these communities because people already pass them as representative," she added.

Madaleng said residents in cities, where these beggars find themselves in during Christmas, have already formed rules about how rich and powerful these Cordillera women really are.

Many of the beggars profiled by Bagani and Bagani studies appear to have "families in Baguio, and are well off because they have houses, they are well fed and have professionals for sons and daughters."

"When faces reveal them, of her respondents look to their home villagers, she exhibited the [rules]. They had houses. They merely found a lucrative way of earning when the planting season was over," Madaleng said.

"The [researchers] told story to Mt. Province involves the first beggar who accidentally fell into this new trade when she lost her money to a big city and befriended the town's beggars. She discovered that every time she knocked out her palm, people would give, and she played the dead with her friends back home," she said.

Madaleng said Mt. Province villagers stopped short of condemning these beggars, mainly because their own families tolerate the practice.

"The sons and daughters made a big show about condemning the practice but they share in the loot and produce the elderly being home from begging in Metro Manila," she said.

Ramos said DSWD had started to address this phenomenon by undertaking a community clean-up campaign.

"We even posted signs warning people not to give to the beggars, but the human rights sector felt that it violated their rights," she said.

The government's response to indigenous Filipino beggars is short-term because it fails to detect the cultural dimensions involved in the problem, she added.

"Old Igorot women are more exposed to larger than national values, but we have Igorot comfort women playing gongs in celebration of old dead practices. They try to rationalize that by playing the semi-nakedness of authentic gongs. Yet they still wear traditional g-strings in actual occasion," she said.

Cebu bishop stops holding pre-dawn Mass

CEBU CITY—For the first time in 18 years, Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Vidal will not be officiating his traditional Misa de Gallo or pre-Christmas dawn Masses in the various parishes in the province.

Msgr. Achilles Sabay, the media liaison officer of the Cebu Archdiocese, said the prelate was advised by his doctor to take a rest so that he could fully recover from the angioplasty surgery that he went through recently in Manila.

Cardinal Vidal had been officiating Misa de Gallo in different parishes for each day of the dawn Masses held nine days prior to the Christmas eve Mass.

The prelate had usually been holding the Misa de Gallo in parishes outside of Metro Cebu—traveling from one town to the next for nine days.

Sabay said Vidal had been doing this since 1986, a year after he became a cardinal in 1985.

As to parishes who wanted to have the prelate officiate their dawn Mass, Sabay said they would need one of the archbishop's three other bishops—Archbishop Julito Cortes of Mo. Rosario Hill in Cebu City, Bishop Emilio Benedicto of Carmen and Bishop Antonio Mesiad of Cagayancillo, Palawan province.

Sabay said Vidal would still be observing the dawn Masses in the archbishop residence here.

Vidal flew to Manila on Nov. 29 to undergo angioplasty, a procedure that unclogs the heart's arteries.

Sabay said the operation was conducted last Saturday at the Chinese General Hospital and it was very successful. (Rosario Sapallocan, PDI Visayas Bureau)

Prepare for flash floods, Quezon execs advised

ROUNDUP

Muslim pilgrimage

DUMAGUETE—Ma-anyag has named Maguindanao Gov. Datu Andal Ampatuan Jr. as Presidential Representative to the haj (pilgrimage) journey to the Saudi Arabia holy city of Mecca and Madina on the first week of January.

Mayor Ampatuan Pins Sinaran Catamsalang band carried Thursday to announce a representation signed by President Macapagal-Arroyo designating him "Presidential Representative to the 2010 Haj Pilgrimage." The President also named Datu Tiks Hussin Ibrahim as deputy chief of mission of pilgrims. Despite the difficulties, thousands of Muslim Filipinos are expected join the Haj, which has rituals for repentance and self-purification.

Abel Machera, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Hi, Baking 21

BACOLOD CITY—Melody Nelson, 21, younger sister of lawyer Nicole Sia, the suspended Lewis to Nelson Jr., SWORN affidavit submitted to the trials on Dec. 12 to the Negros Oriental Regional and Medical Center, the body lies at the family home in Canlaon City. Interment will be announced later.

PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Village watchman slain

BINMALEY, Abra—A barangay tanod (village watchman) was killed while his companion was wounded on Monday when they were attacked by a local government official here. Police said Sterling Sto. Ali, died instantly while his companion, Ruling Sto. Ali, was taken to the Abra Provincial Hospital. The gunman escaped.

Arlie Rio Perante, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Solcom denies shooting

LEGENA CITY—Southern Luzon Unified Command chief Maj. Gen. Pedro Cabuay denied that government soldiers were behind the shootings of an activist during a human rights day rally on Dec. 10 in Daet. Commission Bicol Nationalist Bayan was killed during the incident, which also wounded four people, including two children. Cabuay formed a fact-finding committee and tasked Brig. Gen. Fabian Santos, Solcom's deputy commander, to head it.

Zaida Rafael Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Mindoro gov buried

CITY OF CALAPAN—Thousands of people joined the funeral of Oriental Mindoro Gov. Rodolfona Mandanas Sr., at the Calapan Memorial Ground on Dec. 3. He died of lung cancer and pneumonia on Dec. 1 at Sto. St. Luke's Hospital. From the Jose Leuba Memorial National High School, the remains of the governor were brought to the provincial capitol. His former's casket was pulled by a carabao, symbolic of his campaign slogan, "Gobernador ng Masalita."

Madonna Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Relief for Mangyans

CITY OF CALAPAN—More than 1,400 packs of assorted goods were distributed to victims of typhoon Ondoy among the Mangyan tribal, Panaytayan in Mansalay and resettlers in Barangay Batuhan, Iyan and Tumalaytay in Roxas town, all in Oriental Mindoro on Sunday. The goods were collected from the 9-day telethon called Bahay Bagay-Bayan. Gaspy Pandaan-gan (TVSM) coordinated with other the solidarity that left thousands homeless. The program was coordinated by the provincial government and cause-oriented groups and individuals.

Madonna Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Relief goods sent

12,000 to 40,000 families in typhoon-ravaged areas of Bicol, Aurora, Nueva Ecija and the Cordilleras provinces have benefited from the disaster response that San Miguel Corp. (SMC) immediately launched following the government's call for relief assistance in areas ravaged by several typhoons recently, according to a press release. Less than 24 hours after Pepeng made a landfall in the north, SMC mobilized its resources to distribute about 25,000 boxes of food and six liter of distilled water and 1,000 boxes of canned beef to casualties and evacuees. "We are committed to respond to any natural calamity that may hit the country no matter how difficult the terrain is," said Ramon Ang, SMC president and chief operating officer. "Our relief goods were sent through the Philippine Air Force, Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine National Police, Philippine Army, SMC Foundation, Inc., SMC Transportation, SMC Ready Mix, SMC Aggregates, SMC Construction, SMC Asphalt, SMC Bulacan Agricultural Trading, Inc., SMC Global Power Holdings Corp., SMC Infrastructure, SMC Consolidated Power Corp., SMC Ecogreen Oleochemicals, Inc., SMC Petron Corp., SMC Shipping and Lighterage Corp., SMC Mining Corp., SMC Magnesita Refractories Co.,

METRO

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2 suspects in killing of Dolphy grandson arrested

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

POLICE have arrested two suspects in the killing of Jerome Carlo Quinzon, grandson of comedy king Dolphy.

The suspects, Jerome Flores, 23, and Algie Magdaraog, 23, however, denied allegations that they were among five young men who shot Quinzon Saturday.

Quinzon, 14, died of a gunshot wound to the abdomen after assailants on a motorcycle opened fire at him and his cue friends in Barangay La Loma at about 5:20 a.m.

His two friends were wounded in the incident but have been reportedly declared out of danger.

Members of the Central Police District (CPD) Station 1 in La Loma arrested Flores Saturday afternoon in Caloocan City after a witness tagged him as among the suspects.

Police later arrested Magdaraog when the latter went to the police station to visit Flores.

CPD Director Nicasio Fadeyan said the keynote that a witness positively identified the two as among the five suspects who attacked Quinzon's group.

Flores and Magdaraog admitted that they were members of the Tau Bisaya Style group, a self-styled street gang in La Loma and Caloocan City.

Quinzon, the two said, was a member of their rival group Brazilian Street Terror.

However, they denied they were among those who shot Quinzon.

Flores said he was at home sleeping at the time of the attack because he was drunk the night before.

Magdaraog said he did not know Quinzon personally.

A day after the killing of Quinzon, another teener was shot in a gang war in Manila.

Randel Tejadera of Barangay 666 San Andres Bukid, Manila, was shot after his gang clashed with a rival group on Pedro Gil Street in Paco at 5:50 a.m.

Police said the two groups were first supposed to have engaged in a rumble choosing malicious before someone fired a homemade shotgun.

Tejadera was hit with three pellets in the chest and arm.

Both gangs had just attended Dawn Mass at the Paco Catholic Church. With Steve Quimsumbing

"WE DIDN'T do it," Jerome Flores (left) and Algie Magdaraog, the two suspects in the shooting and killing of Dolphy grandson Jerom Carlo Quinzon, are presented to media after their arrest Saturday afternoon.

Filmfest to go on despite Poe death

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE SHOW must go on.

Despite the recent death of actor Fernando Poe Jr., Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chair Bayani Fernando said there was no reason for it to affect the holding of the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) this year.

"We are even looking for a higher income this year," Fernando said, also this MMFF chair, said in a phone interview.

He declared, "The movies are improving in terms of quality and entertainment."

Fernando stressed that since he became MMDA and MMFF chair three years ago, the film festival's income had been improving.

"The festival earned P230 million last year and we are looking at earning half a billion this year," the MMDA chair said.

Fernando said the MMFF Parade of Stars would be held as scheduled on Dec. 26, with the festival's eight films passing through White Plains via Edsa, Araneta Center in Cubao, Quezon Avenue, Elapanyay Boulevard, Nagtahan, Pres. Quirino avenue, Roxas Boulevard, to Rizal Park at the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex.

The MMDA Traffic Operations Center will deploy 162 traffic personnel, including 20 motorcycle escorts.

The MMDA Traffic Enforcement Group and the National Capital Region Police Office will also deploy 240 traffic officers to be stationed around.

For, known as the King of Philippine Movies, had been a key figure in past MMFFs with his movies, especially that of the "Ang Probinsyano" series.

Drug laboratory suspect escapes

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE PHILIPPINE Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) is on the spot, again.

PDEA was blamed for the dismissal of charges against two Chinese men caught allegedly operating an illegal drugs laboratory inside the Multinational Village in Parañaque City last year, the agency has had another suspect in a similar raid have Screwed up.

Li Cheng Heng, alias James Hong, who was arrested last month in another alleged drug laboratory in Multinational Village, escaped from his detention cell at the ground floor of the PDEA Metro Manila Regional Office in Quezon City.

A PDEA report said Li escaped by destroying the grill cover of the window in his cell.

But PDEA chief Anselmo Avenido Jr. himself said yesterday that he found the report incredible.

"It's a very mysterious escape," he said in a radio interview. "It's very likely that someone from the PDEA helped him escape through the gate."

Avenido said he was so angry over the escape that he kept PDEA Frederick Planilla, the time guard watching the PDEA cell that time, in the cell where Li had stayed.

He also placed under technical arrest Chief Insp. Emelo Bacaltos, officer in charge of the PDEA custodial group, and PO2 Rolando Duazo, the other guard who was supposed to be on duty during the escape.

Li was no ordinary detainee.

Suspected of working for a big time drug ring, he was arrested at the alleged drugs laboratory on his second floor, Multinational Village, last month.

The house yielded a huge volume of chemicals used in manufacturing high-grade shabu. Some of the ingredients were subsequently destroyed by a fire that mysteriously gutted the storehouse where they had been placed for safekeeping.

PO3 Reynaldo Bonjoda discovered that Li was missing at 5:05 p.m.

An outside inspection of Li's detention cell showed that the hollow metal steel bar covering a small exhaust fan had been sawed off.

But assuming that Li could possibly fit his 5-foot-8-frame at the small opening, the room would have been "hazardous," Avenido said in a statement.

"If the escapee used this, he could (have been) seriously injured because he would be jumping a height equivalent to three stories."

A second angle, that Li had connived with a PDEA man, got a boost from Joy Ayuste, night shift guard at the parking area.

Ayuste said he was supporting the idea at about 2 a.m. when he noticed a "slender male person" who appeared to have been "waiting for somebody" while standing near a car parked in front of the PDEA headquarters.

"He did not bother to check or confront the person because he (thought he was a PDEA personnel," Avenido said. "But it is possible that the person could be the detainee who might have slipped through the door while the guard was asleep."

Filipino invention goes global

INTERRUPTORS from six nations have taken interest in a Filipino gas saving device and have signed memoranda to sell the gadget in their respective countries.

Representatives from Gangasjari M. Djunaidi, PT Usa Indo Abadi Bradenindah, Cannon Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (Thailand) Industries, Hitesh J. Gaikwad (India), HAF M. HAWEIRIT FOR TRADING (Saudi Arabia), and H. Khoo (Oceania) Pty. Ltd. (Australia) recently signed a contract for the sale of the Elston Super Turbocharger in their countries.

The contract signing was held at the Intercontinental International Corporation (IIC) Head Office at the President's Tower, Timog Avenue, Quezon City. IIC manufacturers the gas-saving device licensed by inventor-driver-turned-businessman Felix Elston.

In a statement, Jake Cardinoza, IIC vice president for sales, said that with the setting up of its international offices and 79 dealerships covering the whole Philippines, the corporation now focused on expanding internationally.

Elston is an instrument attached to a gasoline engine. Its makers say the gadget facilitates gas savings by controlling the mixture of air and fuel, resulting in optimal efficiency.

Tests conducted by the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Energy and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources showed savings of 20 to 30 percent in gasoline consumption for car engines with Elston.

Also, harmful emissions were greatly lessened after the gadget was installed in the test engines.

Cardinoza has disclosed that the Super Turbocharger working on a device for diesel engines.

SANTA bear keeps Migui company at the hospital.

3-years-old and fighting leukemia

By Jerry Esplanada

THE Chikiamas, Ma. Carmela Bombeobarao, a single parent from Tagaig, is hoping for a miracle for Miguel Angelo, the youngest of her four children.

"Miguel," who is only 3 years old, is afflicted with AML, a rare form of leukemia.

The young boy has only nine to 12 months to live – "even earlier if he fails to undergo a much-needed bone marrow transplant," his attending physician at the Medical City hospital in Pasig City had told his mom.

Cure for AML, short for juvenile myelomonocytic leukemia, is not common, according to Dr. Ritchie Thaine, New York-based Leukemia and Lymphoma Society-in-USA.

The disease has been "resistant to chemotherapy. Improvement in survival occurs after a stem cell transplantation from a compatible sibling.

"The median survival of patients with AML is usually less than two years," said an LLS fact sheet obtained by thenbombeo.

Despite the stated reasons for hope, Bombeobarao is not giving up.

"A miracle is always possible. I've been praying for one since Migui was hospitalized Nov. 24," said the executive secretary of the construction firm First Balfour.

Bombeobarao has learned from Dr. Vincent Sita, Miguel's pediatrician, that "getting a compatible donor (for the bone marrow transplant) isn't easy."

"The transplant (preferably from a sibling) was the suggested treatment. It's not the cure, but it could prolong my son's life," she said.

Migui has a sister, Mica, who is 15, and two older brothers, Ian and Ross, who are 12 and 10.

"But it's not a sure thing. If we fail to get a match, we'll have to seek the help of St. Luke's Medical Center, which normally does out-of-country search for bone marrow donors," said Bombeobarao.

Here, only St. Luke's and the Asian hospital, both in Metro Manila, conduct bone marrow transplants.

When interviewed, Bombeobarao considered Migui's bone marrow bad deplete her savings.

Chemotherapy drugs cost P10,000 to P15,000 per treatment. Migui has just started his first chemotherapy session which lasts for five days. The next session follows after two weeks.

Soon, the thenbombeos will need to spend at least P45,000 per session of the more "aggressive" chemo treatments.

According to the LLS fact sheet:

furnished to the boy son, "infants with AML fail in their."

"Early pursuit of the first step to cure while enlargement of the spleen occurs in virtually every case," it said.

But Miguel's liver and spleen are already infected, his mother disclosed as she also showed the kid's drained belly.

AML "represents about 15 percent of childhood leukemias. It occurs more often in infants and children under 4 years of age.

"The blood cell and bone marrow findings are similar in some respects to adult chronic myelomonocytic leukemia. Both disorders are causes than originate in a marrow cell that normally has to turn to have blood cells."

Miguel was in a bad mood during our recent visit. Apparently irritated and in pain, he kept on tossing and turning in his hospital bed.

But in everybody's surprise, the kid soon relaxed, cuddled his toy "Santa bear" and gamely posed for several shots taken by business photographer Joseph Agcaoli.

"We hope he'll be able to beat the tough odds and Miguel's remarkable recovery begins real soon. Let's all hope and pray for a miracle," thenbombeos told us while we were about to leave the boy's room.

Choosy cabbies? Here are tips from the Manila police

By Leila B. Salaverria

WITH most people roaming malls and commercial streets this Christmas, the demand for taxis will certainly be high.

However, as in the experience of many cab-riders in crowded areas, some taxi drivers may take the booming their passengers.

Some may even refuse to convey commuters to places which they perceived to be choked to traffic.

And when these cabbies do agree to drive passengers to "lucrative" places, some drivers may do it in exchange for an illegally charged fee.

Sen. Manny Villar, chair of the Senate committee on public order, said these practices should be stopped.

The senator explained that these practices defeat the purpose of the existence of taxis, which is to provide quick, available and convenient means of transportation.

But commuters need not be victimized by such drivers.

They can ask the police for help against abusive drivers and there are complaints they can file, said Supt. Adrian Bajenian, General Assignment Section chief of the Western Police District.

Pagdanganan said that when a taxi driver rejected a passenger on unreasonable grounds, the passenger could call the attention of any nearby policeman or traffic enforcer and ask him to arrest the driver or to issue him a traffic violation ticket.

If no policeman is nearby, the passenger can take down the taxi's name and plate number and report to the police.

"The passenger can file a complaint of refusing to convey a passenger against the driver. That is a crime," he said.

Pagdanganan said the practice of not using the meter and setting for a specific fare, known as "pagbubutasan," could also be used as a basis for a complaint because it would be tantamount to refusing to convey a passenger.

He added that though the corresponding penalty for such an offense was light, at least it would teach the driver a lesson.

Pagdanganan said the police could forward the said complaint to the Land Transportation Office, which would, in turn, impose additional penalties on the driver's license.

But he said the passenger must be willing to file and pursue the complaint so that the wrong-doer would change his ways.

Report: 17 gov't Metro offices reek of formalin gas

By Blancha S. Rivera

NEXT time you visit your local registry of deeds and smell something like formaldehyde, you're probably right.

A study by the Occupational Safety and Health Center revealed that there is a very high concentration of formaldehyde in thirteen Monday's 17 local government units.

An unacceptable amount of formaldehyde—the liquid form of which is commonly known as formalin and is used in preserving human specimens—was found in the wage-earning departments, local registry and treasury offices of 25 of 52 city government agencies covered by the OSHC study.

In a report to Labor Undersecretary Manuel Imson, the OSHC said that 38 sensory offices, nine local civil registry and six engineering departments in Metro Manila have exceeded the threshold limit value (TLV) for formaldehyde.

"A possible explanation for this is that 47 percent of the buildings which were subjects of the study were constructed within the past five years and, thus, can be classified as 'new' with new furnishings," the OSHC report said.

The report did not identify the local government units.

But Imson said that the local chief executives had responded positively to the report and promised that they would make the necessary adjustments.

Open to public

"These offices are often visited by the public, have a certain number of employees and halls of files, and (Some) establishments associated with silicon," Imson said in a statement.

Formaldehyde, which is commonly known as an embalming chemical, is also an important industrial chemical used in building materials and household products. It is often used as an ingredient of glue or adhesives in pressed wood products such as particleboard/plywood, and as preservative in some paints, coatings and cosmetics.

Most newly furnished offices or houses have a higher than acceptable concentration of formaldehyde, especially if the furnishings have not been adequately aerated.

The gas given off by the formaldehyde can cause nose and throat irritation, watery and burning sensation in the eyes, coughing, skin rashes and other allergic reactions caused by contact with furnishings with formaldehyde, the OSHC said.

The DENR, an agency attached to the Department of Labor and Employment, just completed the year-long study covering all 17 local governments of Metro Manila.

Imson said the study was done in compliance with the Civil Service Commission directive setting the acceptable working conditions for government offices, including the presence of sufficient ventilation, clean toilets, potable drinking water and free rat baiting.

Of the 49 offices studied, only 76 percent met the standard for thermal comfort, while only around 10 percent met the minimum requirement for office illumination.

SAD HUG

Tollway employees clear the debris caused by a Dasmariñas, Cavite-bound Jaguar Liner bus that rammed a bunch of the Coastal Road's tollplazas after missing the railings at about 6:30 a.m. Sunday. No one was seriously hurt in the incident.

Group targets abused women

JUSTICE Leonor Inez Luciano has been reelected chair of the International Social Service-Philippines (ISS Phil.) Inc. during the organization's 1st Annual General Assembly recently.

Judge Aurora N. Santos was elected president. Elected vice presidents for external affairs was Lourdes Cacas Quimson; VP for internal affairs, Paz U. de Guzman; secretary, Marilou I. Manuel; assistant secretary, Judith Z. Magpay; treasurer, Lourdes B. Ortiz; assistant treasurer, Flor Pauline L. Dumas; auditor, Fernanda F. Reyes.

The ISS strategic direction for 2003-2006 focuses on services to disadvantaged women and children.

Specifically, its services would center on battling the trafficking of women in Hongkong and Japan, repatriation, temporary shelter, interpretation, helping families/children in crisis and abused children and setting repatriation committees and foreign networks.

UE kicks off nat'l writing tilt

MSEI reports that the country's students are lagging behind in science and technology, the University of the East has launched the 1st Tenacity of the East Technology Writing Contest.

The contest forms part of UE's efforts to tap the interest and talents of the youth in the field of engineering itself to make all its course offerings more relevant to the needs of the knowledge society.

Open exclusively to fourth year high school students who are graduating in March 2004, the writing tilt's goal is to foster a deeper appreciation for science and technology among Filipino youth.

Interested parties will discuss "The Importance of Science and Technology Education" in an article.

All will consider only entries that are original, written in English, 1,000 to 1,500 words in length, unpublished, typewritten and double-spaced.

To qualify, students must fill up application and entry forms available at the Office of the Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, with contact numbers 736-0509 and 735-5493 or 02-locals 1005 and 1009.

All entries should have a separate page indicating the contestant's full name, contact numbers, address, school and school address.

Each high school may field a maximum of two contestants, only one entry per person will be accepted.

Deadline for submission of essays is Feb. 11, 2004. Entries may be e-mailed as an attachment to ue@ue.com.ph, or mailed to: The Secretariat of the Committee E. Phoenix, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of the East, 2229 Claro M. Recto Avenue, Manila.

Entries will be judged based on substance and originality of thesis (40 percent), writing style (30 percent), grammar, and composition (20 percent) and organization (10 percent).

Renowned Filipino physicist and UE alumni awardees for Academic Affairs Dr. Angel G. Rosales and two other scientists from the panel of judges that will evaluate entries.

A four-year scholarship (subject to the usual requisites, equivalent of a 1.75 grade point average) to UE for any of its science and technology related programs awaits the winner.

The scholarship covers free tuition and other fees, books, allowance, uniform subsidy, a transportation allowance, as well as scientific stipend.

Mandaluyong streets opened to vendors

By Ruth L. Navarro

MANDALUYONG: City has given its vendors a reprieve for the holidays by allowing them to ply their wares on the streets for the holidays.

Mayor Reynaldo Gonzales II has allowed the residents to sell on designated areas in Bakakeng, Pamorada and Mrs. Roque Avenue for Christmas.

But starting January, they will consider the vendors permanently on Gen. Roque Street where the city will provide them with their own stalls.

"It is part of our plans to have a flea market on that street," Gonzales said. He explained that Mayor Benjamin Abalos' measure is to ease the city's road and therefore relieve it of the traffic.

The street is a small road that connects Pamorada and Bakakeng Streets.

The vendors, in turn, are required to pay a rental fee to the city.

The amount will still be determined by the city treasurer.

The vending activities will be strictly monitored by the Task Force Anti-Colorum, said its chief, Ramon De Leon. The maintenance will also entail the regular collection of garbage.

The vendors will have a representative in the coordinating team that will monitor the vending activities.

ADAMSOFT WATER SYSTEMS, INC.

Cops offer gift of self this Xmas

By Tarra Y. Quismundo

SERVED first before family

Manila policemen keep this in mind year after year, as they spend Christmas Day on the job. But they have become used to it, remaining true to the oath they had taken on the day they got their badges.

"We follow the one-small-sacrifice-on-Christmas-Day just like what we did the 365 days of the job," said SPO2 Patrick de Leon, in service for 17 years now.

Unlike others who take days off from work to celebrate Christmas with family and friends, de Leon and other men in uniform dutifully attend to their jobs on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, sacrificing the traditional celebration with their families.

Family understands

"My family understands, and they're already used to it. Besides, this is where we get our income, what are they to," said the 40-year-old homicide investigator, speaking in Filipino.

Since he was 23 years old, de Leon has been with the police force, making his three kids with his modest earnings. Every Christmas Day, he would snatch what little time he had to share a Christmas meal with his estranged wife and her three gifts at their Pandacan home, and, if possible, attend mass.

But, as in the past, each extra time might be hard-to-come by for lawmen like de Leon this Christmas, as the Western Police District (WPD) has been placed on code red, a holiday color but for the police means more arrests, more work, and not gifts.

"It's very holiday like Christmas, New Year, Holy Week, All Saint's Day, we are on the streets even more, because that's when there are more people on the streets, that's when we are needed more," said WPD Director Chief Supt. Pedro Bulaong.

Part of oath

"We serve first whom all. When we took our oaths, we never mentioned our families right? But we are used to it. Besides, nobody forced us to become policemen," Bulaong added.

For PO3 Alberto de Guzman, 39, a radio control dispatcher assigned to the District Tactical Operations Group who has been in the force for 21 years, such sentiment rang the truth.

"Sometimes you have to divide your time, but mostly during Christmas you spend more time to service than with your family. At most, I would spend two to three hours with them on Christmas," said de Guzman, who works in the WPD's metro station, receiving and dispatching all reported crime incidents and events in Manila.

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WHAT'S INSIDE

■ Pumaren back with La Salle A25

■ Rossies, Detasin set World Cup meeting A26

■ Suns torch Wizards; Bulls gore Pacers

PAYBACK TIME

Phone Pals drub Realtors

By June Navarra

YANCY de Ocampo really felt at home at the Makati Coliseum.

Returning to the venue which he lit up with his scintillating exploits as an amateur, De Ocampo fired 33 points right in the first game to set the tone for a 102-85 Talk 'N Text rout of Sta. Lucia Realty last night in the Governor's Metropolitan Philippine Cup.

De Ocampo recalled his key role for Mobiline in the PBL with towering jumpers that sent the Phone Pals off to a 29-5 lead, which they sustained throughout.

"It's (De Ocampo) inspired. He usually remembered how Mobiline (Aquino) ran (the) system (from the last) time we (saw)," said Talk 'N Text coach Joel Banal.

In the Realtors' stunning 109-102 win over the Phone Pals in the first round, Aquino exploded for 29 points, including a shifty move in the paint just seconds before halftime that humbled De Ocampo no end.

"That memory kept flashing on (in De Ocampo's) mind so he hustled back by aggressively (PHOTO/PHILS A12)

Poblador Riviera champ

POMPEIO Philippine president Hamanto Poblador took advantage of the pristine conditions and fine weather to shoot a 138 over par 62 and take low gross honors at the recently concluded 2004 Chairman's Invitational at the Couples course of the Riviera Golf Club.

Poblador played a consistent round on the course designed by former Masters champion Fred Couples, getting down a birdie on the 548-m par-5 14th to take the outright win of a double bogey on the tough par-5 11th hole.

Lawyer Elbert Lacerilla finished on a birdie on the ninth hole to win the low net crown.

Ambassador Salvador Carreon took home the Class A trophy beating Joe Sagalongos and lowest ho Salazar by countback while Glenn Castellano ruled the Class B division.

In Class C, retired major general Bo Reyes edged Ben Viernes with a net score of 71.

SPORTS TV

PUMAREN: Three more seasons

SUSPENSE OVER

Pumaren back with La Salle

By Jeannine M. Pays

THE GUESSING game is finally over.

Franz Pumaren will be back as head coach of the De La Salle Green Archers for three more seasons.

"It's the decision of the school and the school wants the team," said Sammy Jose, UAAP president and La Salle's athletic director. "The school feels that (the Archers) have the team."

"I'm sure it will help (La Salle's bid to defend the title)," added Jose. "But there's no timetable yet as to when he'll start practicing with the team. It hasn't been discussed yet."

In fact, some of the La Salle players disclosed that they have yet to hear the news.

Soccer said that Pumaren will resume as athletic coordinator soon.

Pumaren, who steered La Salle to five championship titles, expressed excitement when he announced his retirement after winning Game 3 of the UAAP finals last Sept. 26).

The 41-year-old cousin answered he has "nothing more to prove" and that he has already "accomplished everything" he wanted by the team.

Pumaren, who has served as La Salle coach for seven years, later took a vacation in the United States for "a much-needed break."

In his absence, assistant coach Gee Abanilla temporarily took over coaching the ECTHA La Salle squad in the ongoing PBA Open conference.

Before he left, however, La Salle president Bro. Armin Luistro, FSC, had strongly urged Pumaren to reconsider his decision to quit.

Pumaren hinted his comeback when he said he'll "strongly reconsider" Luistro's offer during the Ateneo Night party last Nov. 19.

He has also been coaching ETH La Salle's recent games from the sidelines.

Meanwhile, the Adamson Falcons have appointed Mel Alas as their new head coach.

Alas, who replaced Luigi Trillo, had delivered successive titles for the La Salle College Stallions in the College and Universities Athletics Association.

Over at the National University, Manny Dalisay will come back as head coach for the NU Bulldogs.

Dalisay, who replaced Rico Perez, is best remembered for having led NU to its first Final Four appearance in 2003.

Phone Pals drub Realtors

From page A13

slowly unyoking the basket," said Bunal.

This time around, Aquino stuck out like a sore thumb on the court, scoring only two points and finishing down a line rebound in 24 minutes of action.

"The last time we played against him, (sic)ed. It was a case of them blowing us out in the second quarter because we got too confident," said Bunal. "It's (team) confidence."

Jimmy Alapag and the 6-foot-9 Ge Ocampo paced the Phone Pals with 20 points each while Vince Pablo, Willie Miller and Mark Telan (Unibos) in double-double figures.

Mikhail (15 points on top of 10 rebounds which included the 6-foot-6 swingman as the 22nd player in league history to have grabbed at least 2,000 boards.

By recovering from a 100-98 (Bell) debacle, the Phone Pals not only squared the lead at 1-2-3 but also secured at least a playoff for an outright semifinal berth.

But if the Realtors had somehow lone to the Stella Express in the second game still being played at presstime, the Phone Pals and the Realtors' Geebers Kings will have a date side to the best-of-five semifinals.

"We didn't do anything special. We just played our hearts out and we won," said Bunal.

The Phone Pals inflicted on the Realtors their 11th loss in 16 games, putting Sta. Lucia in peril of finishing either ninth or 10th at the end of the elimination round.

"This is a good game to win before playing against Gordon," explained Bunal. "They're playing the best basketball in the league right now. And a win like this boosts our confidence."

Meanwhile, Purefoods team manager Alvin Dayrit said will be held by the PBA on Dec. 22 at the Philsports Arena.

Encarnacion

TALK 'N TEXT 105—Asinas 20, De Ocampo 20, Pablo 19, Miller 14, Mal. 11, Cabagnot 7, Belano 3, Salenga 0, Uaresa 0, Fuerl.

STA. LUCIA 93—Lucero 22, Carreon 21, Gonzalez 11, Gonzalez 11, Dato 6, Estrada 4, Asuncion 2, Francisco 2, Castro 0, Lalrosa 0, Lumagui 0.

Quarters: 22-22, 42-42, 71-68, 93-93

BIG MAN: Ramy de Ocampo scores up huge for the Phone Pals, knocking in 20 points to power his team to victory

Miranda steps out of Santos' shadow

ERNIE Miranda is satisfied with his supporting role in the Magnolia 6-0 team in the PBL Open Championship.

He doesn't mind playing in the shadow of teammate Arwind Santos, but he's ready to step up any time.

Last week, the Ice Cream Makers were in danger of having their winning streak snapped with Santos struggling for baskets against a lightweight opponent.

But Miranda came to the rescue, leading Magnolia's scoring game and scoring key points to the last quarter to lift the Purefoods giant in the hard-fighting AMP Armor by a 64-53 win last Thursday at the Cuneta gym.

The Wizards now own the tournament's longest winning streak after posting their seventh straight victory through Miranda's 13 points and 4 rebounds.

The win also assured Magnolia an automatic slot in the semifinals, an incentive for the top two teams after the elimination round.

"I'm just showed what kind of player and leader he is," said coach Ray Banal after Miranda earned the Player of the Week citation from the PBL Press Corps. "He's been playing well lately for us."

Magnolia remains on top with a 6-1 slate.

The other teams fighting for the remaining outright slot in the semifinals are Mcdonald's Purefoods at 5-2, followed by Ginebra Gools and Welcoat Painters at 4-3.

After taking an 11-point lead, Magnolia found itself under pressure when AMP-Armors pulled within six. But Miranda stepped on a shooting line-up to quell the Eagles' comeback.

Santos managed to score only two-points in the game but compensated with 8 rebounds.

Prior to the game against AMP-Armors, Illinois had scored in double figures just once in 11 games.

Despite his scoring woes, the newly wed Illinois cadet third in assists at 4.3 apg and 58th in rebounds at 3.8 apg.

The PBL has taken a break due to the holiday season and will resume on Jan. 4.

Two champs named Poe and Pacquiao

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

THERE was distinct cheer. The bolting crowds gasped and cheered.

But the main picture in Manny Pacquiao's birthday celebration on Saturday was straight out of a Pinoy fairy tale.

Unlike in Pacquiao's last fight in Tagaig, where the crowd was estimated at close to 25,000, no actual count could be made of the poor villagers who came from all directions in Cotabato to watch the would-boxing celebrity.

Of course, everybody who came left empty-stomached.

Other than ace and trash their idol, each villager got a crisp P1,000 bill, noodles, canned goods and at least four kilos of rice.

***

The procession to the Pacquiao residence started in the morning and continued to lengthen as onlookers approached on foot or by motorcycle.

Broadcaster Ronnie Sudsuden, an emcee in numerous crowds, swore he had never seen so many poor people converge in one place on a single day.

By late afternoon, he said Pacquiao had to send in 10 more tanks of rice.

In a plain entrance, Pacquiao, who posed using a bulldozer, was said to have spent P1 million for fuel alone.

Mathematics reported that the endless processions of Pacquiao admirers had been expected to end with the evening feast, highlight of the great boxer's 26th birthday celebration.

***

As dinner the same time in Manila on Sat. urday, an even longer procession continued to snake into the San Domingo Church.

There, too, had been chaos, with several fans getting injured.

But unlike the mob in Tacloban, the crowd in Quezon City did not come for a bite of food.

Of course, as in Cotabato, the endless flow of people in Quezon City also came to feed a hero.

The endless stream of mourners seeking just the handsome remains of Fernando Poe Jr., however, became a none out of an established Pinoy fairy tale.

The FPJ epic could've reached its climax with a victory in the last presidential polls.

But had tried to carry on with his fight, while his seamless business continued to assure their lives had been ensured.

Unfortunately, their love affair with the poor people he loved came to a tragic end after he succumbed to cancer.

***

Meanwhile, there seemed no end to the Pacquiao magic.

The boxing hero will never cease to draw great crowds for as long as he keeps winning.

But here's to explain the great outpouring of love and grief, unmatched hero-worship for FPJ, who could no longer fight his great fight for the post he had devoted of saving?

Maybe it's not improper to conclude that FPJ had confirmed his victory and heroism with his untimely death?

In fact, there's sure the great puzzle on how FPJ could've lost the last election based on the endless amount of supporters in his wake.

One barangay happened in one place yesterday that's responsible the answer.

He swore he saw here FPJ had managed to post a final lead totaling 16,000 votes in one city.

This edge, the kapuso' hero, had been shamefully reduced to only 10,000 when he were sure it constituted to the certificate of canvass.

Stunningly, the man they had rebuked as evil Filipino was now worthy to be a National Artist.

FPJ's supreme triumph, his true championship, however lies in the refusal of his loved ones for the actor to be buried in the kalibugan ng mga Hapon.

Not even Northland Heroes had been devoted worthy of that.

STRATEGY DISCUSSION

Rosales, Delasin set World Cup meeting

By Francis Ochoa

ACTRESS recently honored, Jennifer Rosales is going to set aside her vacation to appear the most important call of all—that of her country's.

Rosales is going to leave the country in the last week of January to meet up with Dorothy Delasin and Grecian Chua plus several others when they represent the Philippines in the World Cup slated Feb. 11 to 13 in England.

"I'm going to meet with Dorothy before the World Cup so we can talk about what we're going to do," said the 26-year-old Rosales.

"I really want to win this thing for the country. Dorothy and I want to be the first to win it for the Philippines."

Already, people are talking about the Rosales-Delasin tandem and Rosales revealed some of the players in the LPGA said they have a serious chance of winning the prestigious tournament.

"We have a big chance to win. Players are telling me that if

ROSALES

DELASIN

Dorothy plays with me, we have a big chance," Rosales said.

The two former national golf team members have played together for the country in the 1998 Asian Games where they salvaged a team bronze in Bangkok.

Rosales has always been proud of her roots and up to now, after having completed two years on the LPGA, she still gets goose bumps just seeing the Philippine flag during tournaments.

"Seeing my flag out there in tournaments, it just makes me so proud. I've never been ashamed of being a Filipino."

In fact, after coming off a breakthrough year, Rosales said that part of the motivation that spurred her to her best LPGA season yet was putting the Philippines in the sporting map.

"It's good to be a Filipino," said Rosales. "I've always been. A lot of stuff has happened, like the floods recently and I told them that I'm able to give people here something to be happy about."

But Rosales feels the World Cup would be an even bigger reason for her compatriots to celebrate.

After all, Rosales and Delasin will be playing not for the prize money but will be representing the country against the best golfers in the world today.

"I'm kind of excited about that, let's see what happens," she said.

Rosales said after both we grew up going into the World Cup, even if expectations are high because of her partnership with Delasin, she added that neither will playing in front of a big crowd of fans here home.

"I don't stress pressure," said Rosales. "It's part of the game and I don't feel that anymore. I also love playing in front of big crowds."

Rosales arrived Saturday morning and said she was "glad to be back home."

"I've really been homesick and I miss my family, my friends, the food here. I've been gone nine months and it's such a long, long time to be away from home."

Annual Christmas jungolf tilt today

A SUCCESSION of holiday season events for junior golfers kick off today with the Nike-sponsored annual Christmas tournament of the Junior Golf Foundation of the Philippines at the Canlubang north and Riviera executive courses.

Nike, through its local distributor Sarbupra Phils., is providing prizes, caps, bags, as giveaways and raffle prizes for the big field of more than a hundred kids vying for honors in six different age groups.

Those in Class A (15, 17 years), Class B (13-14), Class C (11-12) and Class D (9-10) will play at Canlubang north while players belonging to Class E (7-8) and Class F (5 and under) will get action at the Riviera executive course.

Coinciding with today's tournament is the election of officers and renewal of membership.

Tomorrow and Wednesday, the Young Stars Invitational tournament will be held at the Legends course of the Manila Southwoods Golf and Country Club.

The Junior Golf League is also staging its seasonal tournament this week.

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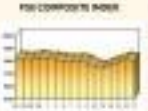

Investment commitments surged 253% to ₱165.3B

CAP assures SEC on new investor

The Infanta that was to be

IT'S SHORT but attention span can be, expectedly with senate that can be for marching efforts on our lives and on our collective future.

The untold loss of human lives, properties and futures resulting from the disaster in Infanta, and resulting issues from Real and General Nakar, is now all too fast lost in the minds of the Filipino public. The woes surrounding the disaster and the lessons we all must learn from it have ceased to be front-page material in the month's in the candle. In fact, the attention span of barely half a month.

It has been crowded out of the headlines and front pages by the customary dearth of fireworks that is, which is raising up to 80 percent of news and public affairs programs in the media these days.

I am not saying that 9/11's death have no important significance in Philippine work, if I am. The concerns compulsorily raised by his borrowed opinion reflect a lot of what is wrong with our government, our politics, our media, and our society in general.

And 9/11's death provides good occasion to examine what lessons to draw to address them.

Unbridled business

But there is much unfinished business in Infanta that demands continuing provincial attention, and which must not be lost in all of it.

Issues, maybe hundreds, of deed remain to be found and people's buried.

There is a great deal of cleanup and repair that must be done. Food and relief supplies are missing short in temporary relocation centers for hundreds of families who lost their homes and livelihoods.

Longer term measures are needed to put those families back on track. Schools must be restored if the recovery possible soon, so the Infanta children could very well be the biggest casualties of the calamity in terms of long term damage to their futures.

Beyond these, the environmental plunder that had been tightly instrumental in the calamity needs to be put in the counterbalance of every Filipino, young or old alike.

Otherwise, the list of unheeded environmental lessons will just keep growing and go for beyond Dinalo and Infanta.

We like to refer to these events as "wake-up calls," but the way we are dealing with them, we have simply been repeatedly hitting the snooze button and going right back to sleep each time.

Are we waiting for someone to loudly pull us out of the bed before we do what needs to be done?

Boosting local economy

A few months ago, I agreed to make a daughter for a coffee table book on the town of Infanta.

It was to be a book that would showcase the charm as well as the great promise of this quiet but fast-moving municipality.

Together with neighboring towns Real and General Nakar, Infanta was poised to become a new focal point for economic activity on the eastern seaboard of Luzon.

The Infanta economy had a lot going for it. Straddling a portion of the Sierra Madre Mountains, Infanta is ecologically diverse and natural resource-rich.

Lamon Bay and the Pacific Ocean provide excellent fishing grounds. This coupled with even a thousand hectares of fishponds has allowed Infanta to produce more than twice 1,000 pesos(US-$20) fish requirements.

Infanta was also producing more rice than it needs (112 percent), exporting its surplus to neighboring towns and as far as Central Luzon.

Industry was emerging, with increasing number having establishments like bakeries, hollow block makers, furniture shops and rice mills.

The making of liquor from nipa sap was also an extensive cottage industry, with over 100 small-scale distilleries in operation.

Its trade and services sector was on the rise, making it the regional service center of northern Quezon.

With its location, it is the logical transshipment point for the Metro-island municipalities, with most of the products and travelers going to Pacific islands passing through Infanta and Real. There were over 300 business establishments in 1995, composed of banks, trading and common establishments and service establishments such as watering shops, beauty parlors, and hardy aviation facilities.

Casual observation would have led any visitor to conclude that business was brisk. I certainly got that impression during my first visit there.

New growth area

Fort Presidente Jaime had grand plans for Infanta, with the town figuring prominently in the envisioned regional development plans for the eastern seaboard of Metro-Manila.

The Master Plan has come under various names, with such new Presidente characteristically intent on putting a distinctive trademark to the initiative.

It was pushed as Longtal Integrated under Marcos, and was part of the Calabarzon growth area pursued under Aquino, the Bicolnipan growth corridor under Ramos, the Bicolnipan cluster of Estrada, and Arroyo's 10-Point Agenda.

The town's potential had not exploited the attention of investors, particularly large real property developers from Metro-Manila.

At least a couple of them are known to have been buying up strategic properties in the area in recent years.

Metro-Manila developers, including some powerful political and government personalities, had been snapping up properties reportedly next or along the coast. Local residents would point to this property acquired by a TV personality, or that lot bought by a rich Makati businessman—word gets around rather easily.

Indeed, anyone with the cash to spare would have been hooked to run to towns in some Infanta real estate—until the disaster came.

Now just off the press, the book has taken on new significance as a valuable photographic and documentary record of the Infanta that was and may be lost.

In sorts, the book is bound to become prized collector's item, and its publishers are using the opportunity to raise badly needed funds for the people of Infanta.

If and in collaboration with one of the sponsors of mgamagan@hotmail.com.ph, or call 0918-9408, if you'd like to obtain your copy, and help the people of Infanta as you do.

John Hay developer again defaults on lease payment

By Russel W. Domingo

CAV Development Corp., the developer of the John Hay property in Baguio City has asked for a third restructuring of its lease payments, according to officials of the Baguio Centennial Development Authority.

BCDA president and chief executive Rolando Abejon said in a press briefing that CAVdevCo's request has not been about P2.3 billion, of which P1.8 billion represent the principal loan, while around P400 million is in interest and surcharges.

Abejon said BCDA was set on rescinding the option to extend the agreement with the Yi-Ayono Group-led consortium, which would mean a recovery of the former American military facility in Baguio City.

He added that the agency has yet to agree on CAVdevCo's latest request for a revised payment scheme, since BCDA has laid out its own plan to address the issue.

Abejon, however, declined to give further details.

BCDA vice president Ishmael S. Zosa, who is in charge of planning and business development, said the real estate developer first underwent a restructuring proposals in 2000, which covered new terms of payment for leases for the same year as well as for 1999.

A second restructuring was implemented last year, when CAVdevCo defaulted on a P70-million payment due in December 2003.

Zosa said payments under restructuring are slapped an interest of 12 percent and an additional 3 percent surcharge.

Under the original lease agreement, CAVdevCo committed to pay P400 million per year in the first five years of the 25-year contract that came into effect in 1996.

Beginning the ninth year, or 2002, payments would go down to P350 million or 5 percent of gross earnings, whichever is higher.

Abejon said CAVdevCo's current failure to make the lease payments stemmed from a Supreme Court decision issued last October, which ended the ten-month dispute between the two groups.

In another development, BCDA reported that it generated P1.4 billion in revenues this year from the sale and lease of military base lands under its asset disposition program.

THE PRIVATE consortium led by Yi-Ayono Corp. may lose its contract to develop Camp John Hay due to its financial difficulties.

Firm to expand palm oil venture

SAMARINDA

President of Singaporean resource company engaged in palm oil production has received expanding its operations, according to Gov. Miguel Dominguez.

Dominguez said that CE Group of Singapore, which has existing palm oil plantations and oil mills in Bulod, Agusan Del Sur and Bukidnon, bought a 300-hectare land in Mindoro and Bandera town.

Dominguez said planning could take place early next year.

"This is just the start. We will try to find more areas for palm oil plantation once the project kicks off. We will continue and encourage our farmers to cooperate with us so we need at least a 15,000-hectare plantation before a palm oil mill can be put up," he said.

Agusler C. Davis, PIA/Mindanao Bureau

Farm sector seen to post 5% growth this year

By Christine A. GAyla

TRF

THE AGRICULTURE sector is expected to post a 5 percent growth this year despite the damages inflicted by the four typhoons that hit the country.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap said growth in the past three quarters had to be credited for the expected increase in farm output for the whole year. The sector posted growth of not lower than 6 percent to the first three quarters of the year.

"We were actually looking at a 3.4% percent growth but this will possibly drop to 5.11 percent due to the typhoons," Yap said.

Agriculture production is being closely watched by the country's economists as it makes up about a fifth of the country's total economic output.

The government, according to Yap, can help farmers recover their losses through the immediate distribution of seeds and other farming inputs. This, however, was estimated to cost the government at least P16 million.

GMA Rice Program director Ernesto Abaleon said palay harvest this year could reach 14.5 million metric tons. This, however, was lower than the target of 14.5-million metric tons that year.

"There is still a chance to increase our output since early interventions have already been made," Yap said.

Short developments, he added, could offer agriculturists in the provinces the opportunity to assess their current programs and pursue diversification plans. Agricultural extension help determine the areas where different provinces enjoy competitive edge.

Scientists cited for stance on new farm technology

AGRICULTURE research firm Sikmanan recently cited the strong stand taken by the Philippine scientific community in support of the use of modern technologies to improve food production and battle hunger.

Moreover, Philippines government and public affairs director Noel Rodrigues said the position of the Filipino scientists "is an assurance that the country is secure in its bid to address the issues of poverty and dwindling farm productivity."

Lending Filipino scientists credit has earned a solid platform behind the government's policy adopting agriculture biotechnology as the foundation for its bid to increase the production of staple food crops. The scientists also rapped attempts by foreign groups to "wage a scare campaign among Filipino farmers to prevent them from shifting to biotechnology-processed plant varieties."

Bothogan particularly cited the statement made by former University of the Philippines president Emil Q. Javier that there was no scientific basis to conclude that genetically modified organisms could harm people and contain plant types.

"GMOs are safe with government agencies undertaking rational screening of these plant varieties before they are commercially produced," Javier said.

Scientists believe that the adoption of modern technology could also reduce the country's dependence on imported food and feeds.

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NCCP wrong on mining law

QUESTIONS OF POLICIES
Romualdo C. Geneta

AMARON Rain Commander, granted assistance of the Solicitor General of Churches to the Philippines, seems to the business that the MCP was "grossly misinterpreted in the Supreme Court decision" overturning its earlier ruling on the Philippine Mining Act of 1995."

Last April, the court ruled that the Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement model (the Mining Act) was unconstitutional. The FTAA is a contract between the government and a foreign-owned entity (the foreigner pools its money and technical expertise in developing and operating the mine).

After the investor has gotten back his investment from the initial sales of minerals (usually the sales for the first few years), he then collects only 40 percent of the remaining income. The 60 percent is split, in fixed percentages, by the municipality, the municipality, the province and the national government. The FTAA was a close relative of the build-operate-transfer (BOT) agreements overall highways.

Here, the Supreme Court, after going over a motion for reconsideration, has ruled that the FTAA is constitutional, after all.

Outdated and obsolete

The MCCP is "greatly disappointed" over the new ruling, or so claims the secretary-general. Was this dismay agreed upon on a general membership meeting, a telephone membership meeting, a telephone membership meeting, a fax, or a referendum? Or was there no formal meeting? Or was there formerly working alone?

The claims that the MCCP affirms to stand against the liberalization of the mining industry by "nullifying" the company of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995. What this affirmation is based at in a general membership meeting? Or did their leaders act alone?

If the MCCP leaders is wrong(ed), then we will be wrapping all to progressive features, such as environmental protection. The mining industry will be regulated under the old law, which is outdated and obsolete.

If, indeed, the MCCP is a whole, stands against the "intensified extraction of our mineral resources endowed by the Almighty God," it is time to review the appointment of some members the churches and the industry.

If there were no mining in the Cities of Puerto Princ, there would have been no mills of iron, no Cubic Nickel, no Redemption. For

TIRES ARE UP, BUT SALES ARE DOWN: Workers at Toshiba [illegible] prepare a Christmas tree, one of the decorations that the company exports to the United States and other developed countries. The industry of decorations, although known for the quality of products, has seen sales slump in recent years in the face of stiff competition from lower-cost manufacturers in China. —

Give tax amnesty a chance, says DOF

By Michelle V. Barros

THE DEPARTMENT of Finance is asking the public to give the proposed tax amnesty a chance.

DOF officials have convinced critics about the proposal, although considered a failure in the past, will help in the objectives of reducing the tax base to beef up revenue collection this time around.

Finance Undersecretary Gracia Tan said in an interview that the DOF would not drop the tax amnesty plan just because skeptics—including the business sector and foreign creditors—did not buy the idea that it would boost the country's ailing fiscal woes.

"Because the very beginning we have not wavered on our stand," said Tan.

She added that the DOF would push for the tax amnesty proposal until it becomes through Congress.

Tan said that what would make the current tax amnesty plan a success is focusing comments on the tax amnesty. The multilateral lender said that unlike other fiscal reform measures of the Arroyo administration, the tax amnesty was really not a program for revenue generation.

But according to the DOF, the goal of some other tax amnesty, if it comes with a nod to donate it, is to help increase the fiscal haul.

Tan clarified that the granting of a one-time tax amnesty is just a component of the plan to require the mandatory and regular filing of SALNs. She said it is the filing of SALNs that will help generate more cash via delinquent and collect appropriate taxes.

The tax amnesty plan, one of the legislative proposals of the Arroyo administration to ease the country's fiscal problems, has already been approved on second reading by the House of Representatives.

Under House Bill No. 2933, individuals and companies with unpaid taxes for 2003 and prior years may apply for an amnesty. Qualified applicants will only be required to pay an amnesty tax equivalent to 5 percent of their net worth as of end-2003 in lieu of their unsettled tax liabilities.

So as safeguards, taxpayers with pending criminal cases of tax evasion, graft and corruption, and money laundering will not be entitled to an amnesty.

But taxpayers with pending tax cases in the courts or the Department of Internal Revenue or BIR will still be covered by the amnesty. They will be required to pay 10 percent of their tax liabilities, exclusive of interests, surcharges and penalties, and to withdraw the cases pending in court.

Those who have been given delinquency notices by the BIR may also apply for an amnesty. But, in addition to the 5-percent net worth tax, they will have to pay 25 percent of the amount of tax assessed, exclusive of interests, surcharges and penalties.

The tax amnesty plan is expected to generate some P5.0 billion in additional revenues for the government by encouraging underground businesses to come out and become legitimate taxpayers.

Oil exec fears hike in fuel prices by 50¢

By Abigail L. Ho

THE UNIONAL but steady increase in world crude prices and the impending imposition of a higher tax on crude and refined petroleum product imports will likely hike local pump prices by a minimum of 50 centavos a liter, an oil industry executive said.

Petroleum Industry Independents Philippine Petroleum Companies Association chief, said the slowly rising cost of crude in the world market would likely push up local prices by 20 centavos a liter, while the imposition of a 3-percent tariff on crude and finished petroleum imports starting Jan. 1, 2005 would affect pump prices by 30 centavos.

If current prices, though, have risen about percent in October and November, would be sustained up to next month, he said local oil firms might have to adjust their pump prices, particularly on the socially sensitive diesel.

Local oil firms had tried to hold off price increases for diesel because of the impact these would have on the operational costs of the public transport sector.

Diesel prices were the high prices prompted local firms to jack up the prices of both gasoline and diesel, with higher price increases chipped on gasoline to adjustthe relatively lower price hikes imposed on diesel.

Shetland said most oil firms still had some P1.50 a liter to recover from their pump pricing, while margins in gasoline only reached P1 a liter.

Under-recoveries refer to hikes in international prices that are not reflected in local pump prices.

Although the Department of Energy and Central Bank Governor Amando M. Tetangco Jr. said that a price rollback was not in order right about now, Shetland said it would be difficult to speculate on prices due to the volatility of international market prices.

As of Dec. 15, the benchmark Dubai crude index was at an average of $34.03 a barrel, from only $33.55 a barrel two days before.

While the price of unleaded gasoline based on the Mean of Platts Singapore (MOPS) tariff, another for refined petroleum products rose to relatively low at an average of $40.21 a barrel as of Dec. 15, MOPS diesel prices dropped to relatively low at an average of $45.08 a barrel from $50.10 a barrel two days prior.

"If crude prices in January are higher than those in December, we don't know how we can maintain current pump prices, especially in diesel," he said.

BSP to sink in $100M in proposed Asia bond fund

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas plans to contribute $100 million to the proposed $2 billion Asian Bond Fund 2 recently launched by 11 central banks and monetary authorities comprising the Executives' Meeting of East Asia Pacific Central Banks (EMEAP).

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura, to said the EMEAP's $2 billion investment to MSF2 was an amount the group members considered "neither too small that it could not benefit from economies of scale in terms of supporting the necessary infrastructure for the fund."

The MSF2, which will invest in dollar-denominated bonds issued by sovereign and quasi-sovereign issuers in EMEAP economies—namely Australia, Japan and New Zealand—builds further on the successful launch of the first stage of the Asian Bond Fund (ABF1) in June 2003.

The first Asian Bond Fund worth $1 billion was invested in US dollar-denominated bonds issued by sovereign and quasi-sovereign issuers in eight EMEAP markets. The BSP likewise shelled out $100 million for the ABF1.

The framework for ABF2 comprises the Pan-Asian Bond Index Fund (PAIF) and the eight Country Sub-Funds, to be launched third quarter next year.

In Phase 1, investments will be confined to EMEAP central banks only. In Phase 2, the eight Country Sub-Funds and the PAIF will be open to investment by other public and private sector investors.

The PAIF, subject to the approval by the relevant authorities, will be listed in Singapore and listed in Hong Kong. The eight Sub-Funds will be listed in their respective jurisdictions and, where appropriate, listed on the respective stock exchanges in the eight EMEAP economies.

"The portion of the Philippines in the PAIF and the Philippine Sub-Fund will be invested mostly in government securities," Buenaventura said. "For Phase 2, the Philippine Sub-Fund is envisioned to be listed either on the Philippine Stock Exchange or at the soon-to-be-launched Fixed Income Exchange."

The BSP chief said the listing of the Philippine Sub-Fund would facilitate price discovery and enhance the secondary trading of the fund.

The launch of MSF2 marks a watershed in central banking cooperation to promote the development of the domestic and regional bond markets in Asia, he said.

The BSP governor cited the ABF2 will have a significant demonstration impact on the Philippine domestic bond market which is central to the country's long-term economic stability," Buenaventura said.

Other members of the EMEAP group are: Reserve Bank of Australia, People's Bank of China, Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Bank Indonesia, Bank of Japan, Bank of Korea, Bank Negara Malaysia, Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Monetary Authority of Singapore and Bank of Thailand.

PLDT, Globe shrug off threat of downgrade

By Clarissa S. Batino

ANY SEPTIC or outlook downgrade on the debts of the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. and Globe Telecom Inc. will not hurt the two firms, according to PLDT and Globe officials.

"We are not likely to borrow more soon," said PLDT president Napoleon Nazareno in an interview. "We expect our self-sufficiency to be directly affected by the outlook downgrade."

The PLDT chief pointed out that the company had been reducing its total obligations. To date, the telco giant is scheduled to prepay a P300-million loan. This would reduce the debt as the parent firm level to about $2 billion.

"We are paying down debt," Nazareno said. "With that regard, we are in fact strengthening our balancing credit."

Delfin Gonzalez, Globe chief financial officer, on the other hand said neither the company would not be borrowing more "for the next years."

Globe said P3 billion worth of five-year bonds in the first quarter and raised $100 million of bonds due in 2012.

"I see no impact on our borrowings next year as we have no plans to issue more bonds," the finance chief said.

Gonzalez had earlier expressed preference for a peso basis to help finance Globe's estimated $350 million capital expenditures in 2005.

Gonzalez said that the outlook downgrade on Globe merely followed the same action taken by Fitch Ratings on sovereign debt. Fitch had earlier revised its outlook on Philippine debt to negative from stable on concerns of fiscal weakness and increasing public sector debt.

Fitch stressed that the outlook downgrade on PLDT and Globe was in line with the sovereign debt.

Nazareno, however, admitted that on a local currency level, PLDT and all other companies would feel the impact of any downgrade on sovereign debt.

"We are not spared on a macro level from the negative effects of sovereign downgrades," he said.

Fitch said it kept a stable outlook on PLDT's long-term peso borrowing, believing this would not be affected by any adverse changes in the sovereign grade.

A downgrade in the rating or even the outlook tends to affect the cost of the rated firm's borrowing as it reduced more risky, giving investors more reason to demand a higher return for their placements.

The debts of PLDT and Globe are currently rated one notch below investment grade—by both Fitch and Standard & Poor's.

Moody's investors Service gave the two phone giants an equivalent mark of Ba2. But the Stern Stewart rating had warned of a possible downgrade.

In April, Fitch upgraded the rating of P1.07 billion local and foreign currency debt to BB from BB-minus after it was announced that Smart Communications Inc., PLDT's mobile unit, would buy debts and control of Philippine Telephone Corp.

PLDT is planning to tap debts by at least $300 million next year.

PLDT's debt realignment strategy is more ambitious in 2005 compared to this year. It plans to share-off $350 million in its outstanding obligations. The decision to prepay debt would bring to $1.0 billion the total loan-cut slaps PLDT retired in 2004.

Of the PLDT's total outstanding $2.190 billion debt, $2.2 billion are owed by the fixed-line business. Wireless subsidiaries Smart and Filhet have a combined obligation of $170 million.

As of end-September, Globe had around $500 million in debt, 80 percent of which are foreign denominated. With its foreign exchange swap contracts, Globe's foreign denominated debt line of previously been reduced to 55 percent of total debt.

Globe has $160 million of debts maturing in 2005 and $300 million in 2006. The company said it has enough internal funds to settle its debts, with a third quarter profits of P2.2 billion full 34 percent against the same period last year.

Gonzalez said the company would continue to hedge its foreign exposure. He said of the US$ portion of Globe's debt in dollars, about 40 percent was hedged.

UNDP, Australia agency boost RP lending firms

By Bernie W. Damicog

THE UNITED Nations Development Program and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) firming up an agreement to share the $3 million earmarked to develop the local microfinance sector.

The UNDP said in a statement that since finalized, the facility would be used as a mechanism to channel short-term poverty reduction to microfinance sector strengthening program (MSSP).

MSSP resident representative Deborah Landey said microfinance was a crucial component of poverty reduction that lay at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as Philippine's 10-point agenda.

The MDG agenda is the pledge of over 189 countries during the 2000 summit to address issues including poverty and hunger reduction, achievement of primary education, promotion of gender equality and reduction of child mortality.

Landey said the successor of the MSSP would mark the International Year of Microcredit in 2005. The arrangement is unique to only 50 of the countries around the world accessible to microfinance institutions.

The $3M was designed to meet the rising demand for microfinance services by underserved poor households in the country side.

The recently concluded program was aimed to help the government meet the national target of 1 million clients by helping Center for Community Transformation, Likhaan and Center for Agriculture and Rural Development expand their outreach using the Association for Social Advancement methodology—a program first used in Bangladesh.

CCT, Likhaan and CARD reported a 134-percent increase in clients over the last two to 18 months as the start of the project.

The UNDP said the MSSP was also rated recently as the best performing UNDP-supported program among 66 countries evaluated in a survey sponsored by the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor.

Metrobank to auction MPC's Fort

METROBANK has obtained a court-approved foreclosure order on Metro Pacific's remaining 18 hectares-plus Fort Santiago property as well as 20 condominium units in the posh Pacific Plaza Towers.

According to the grapevine, Metrobank formally served the foreclosure order on MPC Friday afternoon.

Worse, Metrobank has already set a public auction for MPC's remaining crown jewels tomorrow, after having published an expected the notice of the sheriff sale in a hardly known trade papers.

The entire 18 hectares of still undeveloped land are located along Bataan Avenue and Gate 3 of the former military reservation. MPC chair Manuel V. Pangilinan ran at one point considered relocating the bulk of the PLDT operations there in a planned Bluetooth-type "campus" environment.

According to the grapevine, Metrobank until last month was considering a combination cash payment and asset swap with MPC to help the latter extinguish its P3.4-billion obligation.

It was not immediately clear what prompted Metrobank to cut off negotiations and instead file extra-judicial proceedings with the Pasig Regional Trial Court in foreclose on the real estate mortgage.

According to the grapevine, RPC was caught by surprise by the court order when it first heard of it unofficially.

Both Metrobank and MPC declined to comment.

With the loss of Fort Bonifacio as a result of the currency crisis to, first, the Ayalas, and now, to Metrobank, MPC's once considerable real estate empire has been reduced to the Terrazas de Punta Fuego and Costa de Madera resorts in Batangas, the Pacific Mall in Lucena, plus other provincial projects.

These projects, in various stages of actual development, are scattered in Cabanatuan and General Santos cities, Batulao (Batangas), Urdaneta and Calatrava (Pangasinan), Talisay (Cebu), San Pedro (Laguna), and Lemery (Batangas).

Pacific puzzler

AND SPEAKING of Metro Pacific, its Hong Kong-based parent First Pacific Co. has been named as one of the 21 respondents in attachment proceedings initiated by Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption under the colony's anti-money laundering ordinance.

First in the list of those respondents to a Filipino national, Amador Narvasa, 52, who has been identified in previous news reports as the "king" of illegal lotto numbers operations in the region.

It is not clear what role, if any, First Pacific may being implicated for. The attachment proceedings, if successfully concluded with the HK Court of First Instance, would lead to the confiscation of certain assets that would be disclosed when the trial gets underway in March.

COCKTAILS

Victor C. Aganon

According to a published series of legal proceedings, First Pacific is being made to answer under the so-called Section 9 of The Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance Cap 455, which requires money changers and remittance centers to comply with anti-money laundering measures such as customer identification and keeping of transaction records involving HK$20,000 or more.

The ICAC coordinated with the Securities and Exchange Commission through Assistant Director Ma. Elaiza Hizmalde of the Compliance and Enforcement Department to serve the required notices to the Philippine-based parties.

Of the 21 respondents, it appears that only Pacnet and not other company are classified as Filipinos.

The majority are apparently HK-registered companies.

Heard through the grapevine

THE RUMOR have committed to speed up the delivery of their "seven cars" Hong Grand Tower condominiums in Legaspi Village in July, instead of December 2005 as had been announced.

(E-mail: rockstarlet_pi@hotmail.net or rockstarlet_pi@yahoo.com)

Gov't to launch integrated anti-corruption drive in '05

By Michelle V. Rivera

THE NATIONAL government is preparing to launch next year an integrated anti-corruption drive in 2005.

The plan was hatched during a three-day anti-corruption workshop that had experts from Hong Kong as resource persons.

During the workshop held last Dec. 13-16, Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong said representatives from various government agencies had planned the national government's action plans against corruption.

The workshop had resource persons from Hong Kong's top anti-corruption body Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

"We now have specific action plans that we will pursue to prevent and deter corruption and, at the same time, educate people on how to enforce anti-corruption practices," Amatong said in a press briefing last Friday.

The Philippine government, whose suffering from a fiscal crisis is partly blamed on corruption, wants to imitate the success of Hong Kong in implementing strict and efficient anti-corruption programs.

During the workshop, participating government agencies were able to develop the Integrity Development Action Plan (IDAP), which calls for the implementation of several anti-corruption measures.

The IDAP a detailed rule from corporate prevention, deterrence and education.

Under the prevention category, one measure will be the adoption of a simple (if scientific-sounding) system for government officials and employees, and the implementation of electronic bidding for government infrastructure projects, and procurement of goods and services to promote transparency.

The IDAP also calls for the institutionalization of a performance evaluation system, which is intended to be done through the conduct of transacting reports both by individuals and organizations.

Another is the implementation of an integrity check system that will apply to the recruitment and promotion of government personnel, and the conduct of the so-called Integrity Development Review among corruption-prone agencies. The recommendations of the study will be the basis for the development of control systems in government agencies.

Lastly under the prevention category, the IDAP calls for the limitation in the salary deductions of government employees to allow them to have decent take-home pay. This way, government employees will be less tempted to engage in corrupt practices. The IDAP suggests that the threshold be monthly salary deductions, such as for payments of loan amortization and services fees for private lenders, be set at P4,961.

To deter corruption, IDAP calls for the creation of an internal complaints unit in each government agency, and the adoption of prevention measures for whistle-blowers.

The government also intends to have names of offenders published in online database for public access.

To enhance government workers to enforce anti-corruption programs, IDAP calls for several training programs, such as the preparation of agency-specific code of ethical standards. Under the plan, all government agencies are tasked to have customized code before the end of 2005.

Telcos bid to raise VAT rate in lieu of new taxes backed

By Clarissa S. Bautista

THE TELECOM industry should not be singled out by the government in trying to raise more revenue and firms should instead shift to increasing the value-added tax rate, according to the Foundation for Economic Freedom.

The Arroyo administration is targeting to raise at least P20 billion additional revenues from the telecom sector as part of its P80 billion revenue reform package.

"Improvements in telecommunications and voice have not only led to lowering consumer pricing, it has also led to increased cost of doing business and increased Philippine companies' competitiveness especially the communications based industries like IT, call centers, business process outsource, and others," FEF president Alex Magno said.

The FEF is a non-government group composed of analysts, economists and academicians.

MO is an ordinary tax of frequently slapped only on the value added by a company and thus burden creates a chain of accountability among taxpayers, there are loopholes that have led to huge tax leakages.

Telecom companies are amenable to increasing the rate by 2 percentage points to 12 percent. The finance department said that for several years, most telecom firms, including the profitable ones, have not paid a single cent of VAT.

However, the telecom firms said they had high value purchases for their network expansion that were VAT deductible.

The FEF said the government should lift the exemptions on VAT, including those given to lawyers and the petroleum sector.

"Even without factoring in the effect of lifting exemptions, the increase in two areas can raise revenues by P80 billion per year," Magno said.

He said with the coming legislature of the "slit" tax bill or the adjustments of excise taxes on beer and tobacco, the government was close to achieving its P80 billion target.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. had said it was not opposed to new taxes and was open to paying more to help the government raise an additional P20 billion in revenues.

Globe Telecom Inc. senior vice president Rodolfo Salalima said the P10 billion in additional taxes the revenue administration wants to generate from the sector could be achieved even under the existing tax regime.

PLDT said its subsidiaries were expecting to shell out more than P32 billion in taxes this year and next, according to PLDT chair Manuel Pangilinan.

Pangilinan said the most equitable solution to address the deficit problem would be to increase the value-added tax rate. A franchise tax or any other impost to be slapped on gross earnings would hit even the telcos' competitive but were losing.

Salalima said that apart from PLDT and Globe, the rest of the members of the telecom industry had lost for the red.

"Increasing the VAT would make sure that the entire food chain is taxed. It would force us, our suppliers and the rest of the chain to declare the correct income. Three guys make money also so they should be taxed," Pangilinan said.

OUTSTANDING RETAILER

Bayo, one of the country's leading fashion retailers, recently won the Outstanding Filipino Retailers in the medium-size fashion category award given by the Philippine Retailers Association (PRA) and the Department of Trade and Industry. Accepting the award from PRA chair Victoria Singian (2nd from left) is Bayo vice president Elena Lynn Aguado (third from left). Other chairs are (from left) PRA president Simon-Emilio Y. Tantoco III, Trade Assistant Secretary J. Mamman Hassen, Bayo's Corazon Bitong and Barbara Villas of Barry Lopez, a finalist.

SEC affirms decision on UCC

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission (SEC) affirmed an earlier decision saying that the holding company that bought into Union Cement Corp. did not have to buy the stakes of the minority shareholders.

The decision was made by the SEC corporate finance department and affirmed by the Commission en banc, an SEC official said. To justify its position, the EPD said the sale was not covered by the tender offer rule since it was not made directly but through a holding company.

However, National Life, a minority shareholder of Union Cement, has filed a motion for reconsideration with the SEC and sought the reversal of the EPD's decision. The SEC en banc has referred the motion to its legal unit, the Office of the General Counsel.

Holding firm Semirara Consolidated Inc. (Semirara Inc. (SCI)), the flagship company of the Pilatera Group, sold its 27.3-percent share in Union Cement Holdings Corp. (UCHC).

Mitsui Cement Corp., a 50-percent subsidiary of SCI, also approved the sale of its 20.69-percent stake in Union Cement early this year.

The total transaction was valued at P204 million, involving P89 million for the direct holdings of SCI and $1.25 million for Mitsui shareholdings.

The shares were sold to Semirara Holdings Inc., a local partner of SCI.

UCHC is one of the major shareholders of Union Cement Corp., one of the leading cement companies in the country.

"The sale from UCC is a reasonable deal now," an official of SCI had said. The company's board said in a statement that "it considered the price fair and attractive" and that it was able to find parties that know the cement business or technology, market reach, supply reach and capital resources to make the cement company globally competitive and to maintain its leadership locally.

Elizabeth L. Sarmiento

ANG TAN GOLF
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BIR urged to tap LTO's help in tax collection campaign

THE LAND Transportation Office can help the Bureau of Internal Revenue raise as much as P66 billion in additional revenue yearly, according to Regino Diamond Bay Hermosa Jr.

He said in a statement that the LTO could require the submission of proofs of tax payments by subscribers before approving applications for vehicle registration.

"If there is put close coordination between the LTO and the BIR, the potential additional income tax from individuals can reach as much as P66 billion," Jr. noted. He, however, did not elaborate how the figure was arrived at.

Jr. said almost 2.2 million vehicles were registered with LTO in 2003, while only about 600,000 families filed their income tax returns in the same year.

"An individual who does not pay an income tax cannot possibly afford to buy or own a car," he said.

"There is no car, even second-hand, that can be bought for less than P200,000, which is the minimum taxable income that should pay P37,000 in personal income tax," explained Jr.

He said if the government must find ways to enhance tax collection to avoid introducing new taxes.

The executive branch must also ensure that existing tax laws are effectively and efficiently implemented to optimize its revenue collections," Jr. asserted.

Of the eight revenue measures proposed by the Arroyo administration to raise an additional P66 billion in revenue yearly, only the adjustment to the excise taxes on beer and tobacco might be approved before the end of this year. Clarissa S. Bautista

Tighter disclosure rules pushed

By Elizabeth L. Sarchez

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange (PSE) may be tempted to found its proposing that the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) tighten disclosure rules as an additional safeguard for the investing public.

The PSE, chaired by retired Supreme Court Senate Associate Justice Jose Vitug, was recently put on the hot seat to resolve a probe done by the PSE's policing unit on Metro Pacific Corp. for alleged insider trading.

Some brokers had alleged insider trading for failure on the part of First Pacific Co. to disclose its plan to sell a 5-percent stake in subsidiary MPC.

The MB recently cleared MPC and FPC of insider trading. It ruled, however, that this particular case of alleged insider trading could not be dismissed from the disclosure rules under the Securities Regulation Code. Citing the SRC, the MB said that "what the SEC requires is to be disclosed to change in ownership, not a planned or intended change in ownership. The language of the provision would indicate that the obligation to disclose arises after the sale, not before the sale."

Therefore, "FPC (First Pacific Co. Ltd.) is not required by law to disclose its plan to sell MPC's 5-percent outstanding capital stock before effecting the same."

"The fact that no such requirement is provided by the law inevitably means that such shareholder may dispose of its shares prior to disclosure without running afoul with our tender trading law," the MB said in a resolution. The MB also said that it is pro-side disclosure, for example, "it is possible for the planned or intended sale not to materialize and in such case, those who sold at a lower price may suffer damages.

In a pro-sale disclosure, "investors who bought prior to the disclosure, as in this case, may suffer damages when the share price goes down after the disclosure of the sale for a substantial or controlling shareholder is made."

MB noted that the fact that the law "requires that disclosure be made after change of ownership is a clear indication that legislators made a policy choice in favor of post-sale disclosure."

"The board cannot second guess this policy choice made by Congress," MB noted, adding that the law did not prohibit a controlling shareholder from making a disclosure ahead of the required 10-day period. The MB said that FPC "should have been well advised to make an early disclosure so that the market would not have awakened to disclosed."

Most importantly, the MB noted that "the 20-day period is a minimum requirement to protect the investing public." There "is nothing to prohibit a rule prescribing a much shorter disclosure period. If in the judgment of both the SEC and the PSE, an earlier disclosure will further protect the investing public."

The current PSE rules have a three-tier period but it covers only directors and officers and not controlling shareholders like FPC. The MB recommended to the SEC that it shorten the 10-day period.

CAP assures . . .

were pushing for more investments in the manufacturing and services economy.

"While an aggressively pro-more investments in infrastructure is to improve the business environment, the manufacturing and services sectors provide the jobs for our people and produce the goods for consumption," Perlas said.

In the first 10 months, commitments and projects in manufacturing and services reached P40 billion or 48 percent higher than the

6 oil, gas . . .

line during the first seven years of operation.

Perez had earlier said that the DOE was also likely to award within the year a service contract to consortium led by Australian mineral gas giant BHP Billiton/Petroleum.

Even while BHP Billiton and consortium members General Corp., Alcorn Inc. and Inc. Andaya Oil already posted a bid to explore nine blocks covering 8,000 kilometers in the deepwater part of the southern Sulu Sea, he said negotiations with the consortium were prolonged due to a January 2004 Supreme Court decision declaring Republic Act No. 7942, or the Philippine Mining P33.9 billion in the same period of 2003.

IT investments kept a strong showing with 97.45 billion or a 66-percent increase from P45 billion last year.

There were 68 projects in IT enabled businesses that materialized to create some 24,000 jobs.

Call centers continued to generate the most investments with a total of P5.9 billion or 78 percent of total IT investments. They also accounted for the most jobs with some 17,268 or 71 percent of the total.

Act unconstitutional.

Under the consortium's proposed work programs, the group will initially invest $1.01 million to conduct geophysical studies on the two blocks, drawing P32 million in the drilling of four exploratory wells.

Perez said the Supreme Court's recent decision allowing 100-percent foreign firms to go into the mining business will pave the way for the awarding of more service contracts within the next several weeks.

In fact, the Justice Department has prompted state firm PNOC Exploration Corp. and Overseas Capital to proceed with their service contract applications for oil and gas exploration over offshore South Palawan.

LIFESTYLE

Lilia Clete Banal-Fortuno
Inquirer Lifestyle Editor Lito R. Zulueta

MONDAY ARTS & BOOKS • TUESDAY FITNESS • WEDNESDAY 3RM • THURSDAY FOOD • FRIDAY FASHION & BEAUTY

THE HARPS. Palace on Cuffs Barbosa in Quiapo

ARROYOS. Forest Park, oasis in pollution-clogged Manila

Celebrating Manila

There is more to the city than ugly malls this Christmas

STOP stalling. Give yourself a Christmas treat by experiencing the city. See it in a new light and enjoy its hidden surprises.

Discover that, under its gruff and grimy cover, Manila hides places of charm that offer a special quality of life. All it takes is an adventurous spirit and a bit of time to unpeel some of these places I would like to share with you on a holiday offering.

Discover the wealth of treasures in Manila. Buy a copy of "Seven Beauty Manila on Foot" by Josefina Mandoza (Anvil Books, 2003). Follow her clearly mapped-out routes and detailed instructions. In any of the 23 walking tours in the book, experience the secrets of Manila that most of us never see.

Josefina Mandoza tells you where to go. Some places are famous. Binondo is first Asia, Continue to Penny, the Quinyamog Market, at the row of antique and curio shops on S. Bolinao and M. F. del Pilar Streets in Ermita.

Let the book take you around the central Manila triangle by the Pasig, where the Metropolitan Theater, Aduana Street Park and the Mehan Garden are neighbors all fighting for survival.

From there, go north, cross the river to Quiapo and end your wandering at the all-wood San Sebastian Church.

Another route from the Mehan Garden area goes southwest, crossing Taft Avenue toward the National Museum Complex, Intramuros, Rizal Park, and the Manila Bay corner. For each recommended location, she maps out short walks; meticulously points out what to see, buy or eat, and the restrictions to guard at.

Celdran's Manila tours

If you prefer to be guided through Manila, Carlos Celdran is the person to do it for you. His one-hour to three-hour walking tours around the older districts of Manila. His entire arsenal of main streets, take detours that poke around fascinating back roads and alleys around Escolta, Intramuros, Quiapo, Chinatown, and other inner-city places.

Carlos' humor can be called irreverent, but he does give new life and interest to much-hailed, smelly urban heritage. Old buildings and historic districts take on a fascinating new dimension with him. Celdran's strong

CONTINUED ON C2

METROPOLITAN Theater

PRIDE OF PLACE

Augusto F. Villalon

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A visual arts grab bag

Gina Dorrimundo
Contributor

THE 84th Annual, centenary of the Art Association of the Philippines, now on its 57th year, has had its share of troubles from both its foundation and post-impetus.

Some observers think the AAP has drifted itself by catering to too many categories—printmaking, for instance, which can very well be taken up by the Printmakers Association of the Philippines, or digital art, which could have been handled by a sponsoring group like Ayala.

This year's AAP Annual, as expected, witnessed a generally lopsided contest in many categories, such as (a) intimidating (with a handful of entries) or (b) artistic (even much less).

On the other hand, the Painting Category claimed the biggest number of participants, 128 in all, compared to mixed media, with 46.

Sculpture, often underrepresented, had even fewer entries this year with 25, and that is only number or quantity is concerned.

Motley mix

In the painting category, the figurative landed it over the abstract, and in a motley mix of media. Some of these works had overwrought images that left pieces to third-guessedness.

Joel Batcabana's first-prize winning "Alabastro" takes a jab at the Church hierarchy in the Pope, who is shown wearing a mask while extending his hands to greet a bunch of well-wishers.

On closer view, the group includes clowns and buffoons, while around the Pontiff is a coterie of officials, and on their palms pyramid-shaped objects, caricatures of the religious groups that put her present relief to temporal problems.

Angelito "Tad" Estella's contest-up in acquarelle, "Burn-out," tackles a subject sorely familiar to most artists: a writer's block. It shows the long-maned artist in front of an empty canvas, his forehead furrowed, while the deadline, scrawled on the wall hanging by the easel, looks emphatically clear. Strewn around him are crumpled sheets of paper, the light captioned at in-state measuring chiaroscuro.

Emmanuel Balbon's "Throwing Stones as Humdrum Delights" is a most powerful evocation of the country's abominable scrabbles, now going to the dogs, very soon, made to look like gladiators sizing for the kill.

The contest up "Save the Africa," by Edwin Moreno delineates the story of Christ's Passion, with the tortured image on the canvas which a needle is mounting a plank, the nails symbolically sealing the fate.

Adalberto Perez "Emergence" resembles a Mission-like amalgamation generated by technology, a visual delight though after a bit background wondering.

John Joel Asercion "Touch Guard" is an abstract rendering in dripping paint, geometric forms and graffiti—an amusing-looking take on a world gone mad by terror.

Pedro Pelayo's "Frozen Identity" pushes the puzzling quest for identity with innovative treatment.

Less satisfying

Ostensibly less satisfying are the mixed-media entries, reflected in the limited number of truly deserving works that made it to the final list. The selectors were highlighted by a discussion on whether to give recognition to an entry that have been similarly executed in other contests, including last year's AAP Annual.

The work in question was Philet Bolanteno's "Bamboo Tattoo," an installation of cut bamboo poles arranged on canvas, with a window in the middle of the piece. In its forerunner's past work, this piece has stickers plastered on its poles, a technique which a juror had initially thought was handpainted.

All four judges were, however, unfamiliar with the artist's track record. So, despite a juror's eyebrow-raising invocation, they handed him the top prize, anyway.

Second prize went to Armando Tolosa's "Journey to a Crowded Room," which incorporates a number of techniques and media such as printmaking, driftwood and rust-agated panels on mounting and to the image.

The third-prize winner, Raul Pindot's "Where fools Meet," has two major points that converge in the middle part. The boundaries spill over, as suggested by a wire for input hanging in a curvilinear position.

Jaro Bariola's "History Repeats Itself" is a stark gray-and-black configuration of a dire warning acts taken by signs and symbols and graphics, a frightspun message on humankind's transgressions.

Salvador Ching's "Pathway" is an assemblage of recycled jail bars and pipe fabric in a neat grid-like configuration.

Eugene del Rosario's "Phantasmagoric Dream in a Wind of Someone Awake" has a dipsydoo-like arrangement of two seemingly disparate images one acid-dreamed on a natural deluxe and another to an ultra-modern abstract composition.

Weakest link

The sculpture Category is dead, the annual's weakest link, but very little going for it, both in the number and quality of entries.

Rudel Tolibas's "Free Wheel" (first prize) is a wooden contraption featuring the circular gadget in muted ethnic wound around the entire figure. With its natural organic look, the piece hardly pays homage to materiality, and neither does it transcend its organic specimen.

Allan Balolo's "Sangyaw Ilaby Emrao" (second place) is an assemblage of recycled metal parts salvaged from a boat.

Jonathan Salvani's "Gaming Equipment" (third prize) is made of basically one enchanted square box fitting piled up like a totem pole that's purportedly harnessing itself (although, of course, it has been reinforced by perhaps hardly).

Mark Salazar "Pilgrims" al-

A PHOTOS, C2

AAP ASSOCIATION of the Philippines president Fidel Garmisano, with runner judges Tan Asercio, Chichi Sulas, Marlene Aguilar, Mario Parial, Gin Albos, Gino Dorrimundo, Theo Marsh, Ajay Fernandez, Ana Labrador and Oscar Campomanes

"KMRI ng Kasuyadaan," by James Doloroso

"JOURNEY to a Crowded Room," by Armando Tolosa

"ANTELOD," by Jonathan Londres

"PATRIOMO," by Salvador Ching

Celebrating Manila

From page C1

message is that Manila's vanishing heritage must be preserved. For information and schedules, contact architecture@philmail.com.

Bahay Nakpil

This was the home of prominent historical figure Dr. Arcadio Bautista-Nakpil to have the Philippine flag. Bautista was a philanthropist and prominent figure deeply involved in the Philippine Revolution, a close colleague of José Rizal and Asociación.

Sharing the house with Bautista was Sacramento official Juan Nakpil, who married Gregoria de Jesus, widow of national hero Andres Bonifacio.

The celebrated painting "Heroes Life" by José Luna, now the centerpiece of the UBS Museum, originally hung in the Bautista-Nakpil house.

The Nakpil house on Calle Barlosa (now Dr. Arcacio Bautista Street) in Quiapo is an outstanding example of Philippine architecture. It was designed by architect Juan Arellano in the classic bahay na bato style. The detailing done in ruins of the century Victorian Revivalist style makes the house one of a kind in the Philippines. All carvings, woodwork and millwork are executed in the same elaborated, geometric lines depicting floral patterns.

Bahay Nakpil is now a museum open to the public. For information, call 7549541.

San Agustin Museum

Probably the best collection of Spanish colonial religious artifacts open to the public in Manila, the San Agustin Museum in the cloisters of San Agustin Church is an unforgettable experience.

San Agustin is the best place in the country to see the most exquisite santos (wooden statues), religious paintings on wood and canvas, altars, silver, ceremonial ornaments, old parchment manuals and hymnals.

Inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage List, San Agustin Church is the oldest stone church in the country and definitely worth a visit.

A Christmas exhibit of 200 Philippine and foreign babies (historic artefacts) is now on exhibit at the second floor cloister.

Call 5274060.

PAINT of San Agustin Church

Museo Pambata

Can you actually have fun in a museum? If you have to ask that question, then your problem haven't been to museums lately.

Bring the children to Museo Pambata on the corner of Roxas Boulevard and UN Avenue. Also take them to Museum of the Filipino People on Agrifina Circle in the Tao Avenue area of Rizal Park.

Museo Pambata is the ultimate children's stop. It is a "touch me!" museum with interactive exhibits setting a fun atmosphere where children (and adults) learn basic scientific facts and the rudiments of electricity among other things. It is where simulated jungle complexes with mini waterfalls teach proper care of the environment.

Heritage is not forgotten at Museo Pambata. Scale models of Spanish-era houses in the Manila district of Binondo are living exhibits, child-size playhouses where children can enter to play with tactile exhibits which teach how their great-grandparents lived.

Roaring children squeal with delight as they experience Museo Pambata is crowded enough to be having taken the trek to take them there. For information, call 5251797.

Museum of the Filipino People

The Museum of the Filipino People is a fun place. If you think museums are fantastic places whose stuffy exhibits are covered with dust, this is the museum to change your mind.

Its interactive exhibits light up as the touch of a button and set off a chain of sound effects. Animate in many illuminate to show where the different people of the Philippines live. Engaging videos and amazing exhibits trace the evolution of Filipinos and their land.

The "Kuwentong Bayan"—The Sun Rings 1500 Time Capsule" traces the saga of the Sun Rings, a Cebu-constructed gallows that sank off the coast of Hamaguy, Batangas, as it was sailing off to battle against the Dutch. Its exhibits are samples of its cargo—weaponry, ceramics, jars and even delicate textiles—recovered through an extensive underwater archaeology project.

It is difficult to leave the Museum of the Filipino People without rediscovering pride for Filipino traditions, an elusive feeling for the Filipino these days. Call 5246600.

Manila is not a city that stands to win urban beauty contests or rank high on the yearly lists of the world's most livable cities. However, she does have a few surprises up her sleeves.

E-mail your feedback to sfelimino@hotmail.com

MOROCCEROS Forlot Park's grease not ready

Architecture atlas now available

"THE PHAIDON Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture" is a global survey of the most outstanding contemporary works of architecture completed over the last five years. This atlas is a comprehensive, up-to-date reference book from Phaidon Publishers. It contains exquisitely detailed descriptions of buildings of every type, from museums to mansions and banks to airports.

Also inserted among its tastefully laid-out pages are well-researched biographies of the most prominent and active international architects of our time. Established titles, curators, journalists and practitioners nominated the buildings included within the covers of this book.

"The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture" is now available at National Book Store and Powerbooks.

A visual arts . . .

From page C2

bodies in the nature of reality and illusion, with its Pandora's box like installation partly opened to reveal its contents.

Melvin John Aure's "Re-awakening" is a recycled contraption from Bicol materials, with a partly exposed screen and visible a flower about to burst open. Benjie Rivera's "Tugaw" is nothing but a three-legged bench assembled from discarded wire trunks.

Varied media

Truly the everything spirit has taken the best of our craftsmen and artists, as the quality of unleashed and unassembled pieces has become more pronounced this year, and more glaring among local sculptors.

The Untitled Category, with 20 exhibitors in equally varied media, failed to offer its optional choice of interest from the judges.

Raul Agnet's "Material Fool" easily outclasses the rest with its richly conjured and equally brutal image of what seems to be a beast-stealing, mind-blowing tableau of Pinoy diaspora.

Carlos Casamayor's "Inspirasyon" is a tad too preary in its depiction of an otherwise surreal subject. John Rojino's "Quintessence" manages to be faintly engrossing, but the subject is tested and tried one.

As to painstaking, which managed to attract just six entries, it was clear from the onset that James Ordaneta's "Isaw ng Kumpisalan" was fated to be the winner.

Napoleon Ramonal's "Pato at Nagsir" and Dominic Cariaso' "Pantalion Bara" manage to look fresh and charming in their interpretation of the Pinoy's penchant for fun and feasting.

Equally handicapped by a lack of entries are the categories of digital art and photography. But making up for the glaring lack is Jonathan Lumbres's "Untitled," adjudged best entry in the former, with its phantasmagoric view of a game of chess with man and fish that alludes to the game of destruction on the planet.

Surreal is Joey Ong's "Book," where the view is both hedonistic and kid-centric in character than Lumbres's. Sheilah Dequiet "Transfigure" captures the movement of a group of dancers in a parade, through a less fussy and far from dramatic.

Execrable

Finally, photography again the annual's most execrable category as evident in the low level of competitiveness and output.

Francis Charles Orozco "In Disguise" (first entry), Jaime Zabala's "You," Lyndon Joseph Bach's "Kapag Uto Matanda" and Jonathan Prieto's "Milky Bath" are unquestionably the works of photographers with little daring. They are bereft of drama and realism...those qualities that make photography a stimulating medium for envisioning the world.

E-mail the author at gdrosario@philmail.com

"Bahlbell-Gi.Ft." by Rogelio "Tad" Cortes

They remember him

By Linda B. Bolido

IN LIFE, Blas F. Ople had been a journalist, a politician, public servant. He rose from humble origins in Hagonoy, Bulacan to become a Cabinet member, a senator, the first Filipino president of the International Labor Conference and many other things in between.

Everything he had been in the past converge in the book "As We Remember Him", a collection of reminiscences by people he got to know in his various pursuits. The book was launched on Dec. 14 to mark the first death anniversary of Ople, who died on a plane while en route from Japan to Bahrain for a conference. The longest-serving labor secretary was then back in the Cabinet having given up his seat in the Senate to accept President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's offer to become her foreign affairs secretary.

Fondly headed by his widow Susana Ople-Mendoza and former colleagues gathered at Ople's tomb at the Libingan ng mga Bayani in Makati City for a morning Mass and the launching of the book, a project initiated by Ople's friend Moises Molang Santos, "As We Remember Him," is a virtual gallery of who's who in media, government and politics.

The venerable Carmen "Chiang" Guerrero Nakpil talks about "My Rich Uncle," her former colleagues in the old Roces-owned Manila Times group. But the gifts she received so generously from him "were mostly books... inscribed in his own fine handwriting, flowing with felicitous phrases."

Palawan senator-winning three-term governor Salvador Y. Dino, branch chair of the new Manila Times—and who became the first director general of the National Manpower and Youth Council (now Technology and Skills Development Authority or TESDA), recalls that on his first meeting with the young Ople, the Bachelorette was soliciting signatures for a petition on behalf of tenant farmers of his province. "It [the petition] was an eloquent plea on behalf of all landless farmers not only in Bulacan, but all over Central Luzon," Dino said. At the time, both he and Ople were on their way to Baguio for a conference of the College Editors Guild.

Former Supreme Court Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma, who was president of the 1986 Constitutional Commission, recalls how, when she was being personally maligned in media, at the excess of being called vargas, "He one more in my defense except my former [Constitutional] Commissioner Blas Ople. (Then) Senate presidente pro tempore." In a public statement, Blanca Palma says Ople, in issues that must have resonated in all senators, urged the person attacking her "to publicly apologize... for his derogatory remarks... I don't know of any Filipino senator more deserving of respect than Ople. His demise left a distinct void in the political arena."

Indian Ambassador Sreiberic Cohnsen, who was president of the European Union in Manila when Ople was foreign affairs secretary, remembers, "To his efficiency, (he) added a great culture and a deep interest in European and Indian affairs in particular, ranging from the conservation of works of art to the lasting of tradition by Indians abroad."

President Arroyo calls him the Father of Overseas Employment and the Filipino Statesman of the 21st century who "epitomized, most of all, the brave, honest and citizen public servant who deservedly rests with our heroes."

Other contributors to "As We Remember Him" include National Artist Virgilio Almario, former Foreign Affairs Secretaries Delia Domingo Albert and Domingo Siazon, Jr.; publishers Napoleon Rama and Antonio L. Lahoz; reporter Chua Tiampienzo Guan (Chad Faustino Hilario) Oreña, Jr.; Vice President Noli de Castro; former President Fidel V. Ramos; former Justice Secretary Silvestre Bello III; former Labor Secretary Simeon Datumanong; former senators Renato Cayetano and Orlando Mercado; former Ramon Magsaysay, Jr.; former labor leaders Jose Sonza and Democrito Mendoza; former journalist now Ambassador to Israel Antonio Modesto Rodriguez; Public Attorney Alicia Ross-Lee; Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo; and Labor and Employment Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas.

Eufemia N. Ople, widow of Blas F. Ople, standing, the head of the Philippine Postal Corporation for issuing a commemorative stamp honoring the late foreign affairs secretary

COMMEMORATIVE stamp honoring Ople

ARTIST Pisang, an old friend of Ople, did the cover design of the commemorative book.

Family and friends marked Ople's first death anniversary with the launch of a book

'Woman of Tammuz' and new edition of Sorsogon studies journal launched

"WOMEN of Tammuz" completes A. G. Ursua's tetralogy of novels, "Chronicles of the Changing Seasons," which is a creative rendition of the events of the last hundred years of the Philippine struggle to be free, to be truly independent, and to live in the dignity and self-respect.

The novel, along with the newest edition of "Saruhitan, A Journal of Sorsogon Studies," was launched recently.

"Women of Tammuz" is part of that broad fictional panorama recreated in Ursua's four novels through the eyes and heart of two families, showing with bold colorful strokes the most significant and perhaps the most tragic moments of our history.

Chronologically, "Women of Tammuz" is the second book of the saga, and with this novel, the four significant periods of our recent history are finally completely etched in their distinct details: the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine-American War in "A Shining Season"; the horrors of war and the Japanese Occupation in "Women of Tammuz"; the evils and cruelty of a dictatorship in "Bamboo in the Wind"; and in "Dance of the Insomniacs"—the time of freedoms and democracy—what we did with this great opportunity to make ourselves a people proud of its integrity and freedom.

The novel is available at Bookmark, The Filipino Bookstore, National Bookstore and Books for Less.

"Saruhitan" is published by the Sorsogon Heritage Society Inc. Call 3720614.

UMALDE'S (on stage with editions of "Saruhitan")

Inspirational book provides 'comfort'

AUTHOR Nelson Dy refreshes us with dewdrops of comfort from the Bible in "Finding Comfort." He tackles common basic human problems that often make up "the dark night of the soul": waiting, suffering, unhappiness, bitterness, doubts, even guilt.

Dy gives a set of touching vignettes: a woman trapped in a lowdown marriage; a man spending the prime of his life as a dancer in call-girls; a powerful man kept from fulfilling his greatest ambition; a hit-or criminal at the end of his rope, and more people who met God during their hour of need.

"Finding Comfort" is available at Bread from Heaven Community, National Book Store, Powerbooks Live! in Greenbelt 4 and Philippine Christian Book Store.

NCCA playwriting contest on corruption

THE NCCA is accepting entries to Tanghalan Teatro Balanon 2004, a one-act play-writing contest with "Anti-corruption" as its theme. This project is part of the NCCA's continuing efforts to promote Philippine culture and arts, in line with President Macapagal-Arroyo's policy of fostering culture and arts education in fighting poverty and corruption.

According to Cecile Guidote-Alvarez, NCCA executive director and presidential adviser on culture, entries should tackle the need for social and cultural reform to disrupt deep-rooted attitudes and habits that breed corruption; the formation of a culture of honesty, truth, transparency, and accountability; the cultivation of values and virtues to counter corrupt lifestyles; and the need for outstanding examples of true public service.

Run-ins should be original compositions in Filipino, with a running time of around 30 to 45 minutes. Only one entry per contestant is allowed.

Contestants should submit four copies of their entry with a synopsis and cast of characters, typewritten or computerized, double-spaced on legal (8.5 x 13 inches) bond paper with 1 inch margins on all sides. If contestants, the entry should be in p. 12 Arial or Times New Roman font. Each copy should only be marked with the author's pen name.

The contestant should include a sealed envelope with a paper containing his real name, address, telephone number, biodata, and the entry title. The outside of the envelope should be marked with the title and the contestant's pen name only.

Send to the NCCA Tanghalan Teatro Balanon, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 633 Gen. Luna St., Intramuros, Manila.

The top four scripts will each receive a cash prize of P25,000 less withholding tax. The deadline is Jan. 3, 2005.

INQUIRER banding chair and National Artist Alejandro Roces toast the new novel of Ravenna G. Ursua (left).

"SPIDER"

"FRIENDS"

Art outside the establishment

By Constantino C. Tipay

She's still in diapers, yet she's creating paintings that have already been compared to the works of Miró, Pollock and Picasso. She can't even utter her name yet, but she's selling artworks for an average of P3,000 per piece, and has as far ground P70,000.

Amazing? some may exclaim—but not for attending when one considers that 3-year-old Ewena Emi Baldemor Abad has for grandmothers the show Baldemor artists: her mother Ernesto Delfin, the sculptor Fred Baldemor; and his cousin, painter Manuel and sculptor Angelito Baldemor.

And that's not mentioning that the child's mother, grandmother and two uncles also paint. She is, in fact, a descendant of that artistic Baldemor Pacis.

Artistic talents may not be genetic, but the penchant for art, even the skill, the tempo and the norm for it can certainly be acquired if you're surrounded by such people.

Though she can count a few digits, recite the alphabet and sing nursery rhymes, Emi can't even sign her artworks yet. So her grandfather, who also calls Ernesto Fred, had a rubber stamp of her name made in Japan when he visited recently.

On Dec. 11, her third birthday, the tot spots her first solo exhibit, "Ilo na Ito" (Japanese for "hours of beauty"), in Gallery 8245 at the Ali Plaza, L/4, Shangri-La Plaza, Edsa, Mandaluyong City.

Some 150 pieces in oil and acrylic on canvas and watercolor on paper will be on display until Dec. 26. Half of the proceeds will go to a charity for the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Numbered mostly on 8" x 12" canvases in broad strokes, squiggles, chops and drips in bold color and offset with impasto, the pieces, with titles early on "Spider," "Clouds," "Red Snow," "Mountain," "Monster," are spontaneous abstraction with a few foraging at figures that only wishful eyes visualize.

Gifted child

As Fred Baldemor tells it, his granddaughter's artistic precocity surfaced on her second birthday, when she was gifted with a watercolor set and an artist's smock. Since then, almost every day morning and after noon, she'll be urging him, "Tatda, let's go painting!" and bid him down to the studio.

"Hindi ito mapapalan 'yan, madi ang akdelohon no," laughs Baldemor. "Motong mg pintor ako. Emadodo mga pamilya, kapopintahoyan kuna."

She'd put a small canvas on the easel and, while singing nursery rhymes and Elvis Presley and wiggling her behind, the tot would finish one canvas after another. She averages three artworks a day.

"Gusto niya malaking brush, kaya matitis na bold strokes," Baldemor continues. "Di, malampot lang nang dinalampot ang paint tubes, pinipisil diretso sa canvas. One time she couldn't stop from squeezing, so I had to replace the paint in the tube."

He had to buy her the kind of acrylic that's directly squirted from the tube and brushed on the canvas without aid of a brush, particularly of fluorescent hues.

Her favorites are pink, blue and purple. But sense of color is (but of course) an when she painted unreserved.

Of form, she can create a circle and a triangle, however imperfectly, but has a hard time with the square.

Subjects that come to her mind (properly, inspirational, corruptive anything from the natural world and is because ld of the imagination. she'd just finish a piece and declare (It's a little fish, a little sun, frog, the moon, fire, airplane or a little dinosaur.

"Parang naglalaro lang siya," says the over-indulgent grandfather.

Budding artist

Emi was invited to participate in the Tianjin International Children's Painting Competition held in China last July. And she will exhibit her artworks at the International Art Village in Tokyo early next year.

The artworks show some richness in form and chromatics, but the effusive praise by certain Japanese artists comparing her art to the masters', as told by Baldemor, should be contextualized.

This is art proclaimed outside the established art world, what has been described as a channeling of energy. That shouldn't be surprising, (s)he or, wouldn't call it genius or prodigy—yet... because a child can really create art.

It is, in fact, the true, authentic one, as to be distinguished from the one of artists who have studied Fine Arts but choose to practice the raw art of children (as in the case of Jean Dubuffet, "performing untrained spontaneity to professional skill" as evidence of the power of originality).

It can be compared to Action Painting in its spontaneity and fervor, but as reference Abstract Expressionists here would be absurd. Why, the child can barely even write yet, much less understand what Pollock was up to.

In a sense, though, that art have another great building in common.

"RED Snow"

"FLOWERS"

EDEWNA Emi Baldemor Abad fillfully creates three artworks a day

HOUSES around the Pila plaza occupy the site of an ancient pre-Hispanic settlement.

Pila: A book and a plaza

ALL4ART

Alice Edual Jr.

A Laguna town and an ancient Spanish-Tagalog dictionary show the cultural flowering during the Spanish era

One of the loveliest iconic squares I have ever seen is that of Pila in Laguna.

Unfortunately, when you mention the town's name, most people act as if a lost key to unlock the place. Some vaguely think of long trips on rutted rickety surface—OK, so that's spelled with an F!).

I can assure you that the trip to Laguna is worth it. Pila is a beautiful town.

Standing in the middle of the plaza, one senses history from the early American era and even Spanish period (Fastened around a huge tree trunk). Going there really is the next step, when it is still all true and does not really date unpleasantly to another era.

On one end of the plaza is the municipal hall (built before World War II with its Neo-Classical architecture). At the other end is the huge bronze mass of the church, which, together with the old school house, is a prominent example of Spanish colonial heritage.

The latter building now holds Dra Maxima, Pila's multi-talented potter who specializes in archeological reconstructions (and by the [illegible] of Lazarde) and has wife Cecile.

The name building was the venue for the photos of the town's traditional costumes (rented for the local council) in a round of a wedding ceremony organized by the Mercedarians.

Of course, one of the joys of visiting this town is the chance of being invited inside one of the stately homes. In one particular house, I remember seeing gracious period furniture and a colored glass window (that were featured a calendar).

In the quieter interior of the plaza is a modest and yet pretty dwelling. This is the home of the Belen family. One of the daughters of the house is my friend, Cora Dalisay.

I have written about her and how she founded the school there (and which has included) delong, pako salad, bibingkang dipot. As I can testify (right this gastronomic is delight!

Lovely compound

But part of the pleasure of the interview the setting of Cora's lovely compound just outside of Pila. One looks entertained in an open-sided pavilion set off from an outbuilding only by screens.

Cora works with former designer Paula Gerilla, recommending this unique style is evident in the house. Along with its contemporaries finely-style pieces, one sees touches of the past. I loved the way bunches of dried pandan or anahaw were hung from the eaves to form a kind of curtain.

Cora is known to many people in Pila's heritage advocates. Together with Maxima Reyes of the Pila Historical Society, she has been unyielding foe: neighbors to protect the ecologies of their town's ground past. Cora had lived for many years abroad and, having come home just a few years ago, she found herself drawn to heritage advocacy.

When the first arrived, the town plaza was not as cosmetically as it is today. It was messy and burdened with concrete structures. Cora managed to convince everyone to remove what was superfluous. Pushing quietly but with determination, she and her friends were able to get the Municipal Hall out of facilities to declare the area around the town's monument as a historical zone.

She has not looked back since. Almost every year the town had to fight threatened undermine the integrity of the plaza. She is truly a valiant woman-doing-battle of our period.

During our lunch with Cora, I myself her bringing out a big yellow book. The lament out to be a revised edition of an old facsimile—Tagalog dictionary compiled by a priest, Fr. Pedro Jose Hernandez-ch. The original book was printed over but in the 1832.

Apparently, it is before the Padre José here explained to me, there were never really enough Spanish people to teach the native Filipinos the language of the colonial masters. So it was agreed that it would be better for the priests to learn the local dialects instead, hence the need for the dictionaries.

They also relied on the help of young children who grew up naturally speaking Spanish and a Philippine language.

What I found remarkable was that the book was first produced in the town of Mia mofi. In fact, it is one of the first works in the Philippines printed with movable type.

The 1st on the cover even refers to Ube town as "... la noble villa de Pila." It is this impressive phrase that has always inspired the town. It is no wonder to me that gives substance to her labors.

17TH-CENTURY Spanish/Tagalog dictionary

Looking for the book

Little did I know that I would soon be researching for the same old book. A few months later, while in Madrid, I casually asked a good friend, who was born in the Philippines, if he wanted anything from the general neighborhood of the Prado museum.

The answer was one that I would soon live to regret. He wanted a copy of the treasure of the San Buenaventura dictionary. Though I was taken somewhat aback, I told myself, what could be difficult about finding an old book? Yes, my innocence was actually quite charming.

My first place I checked was my local parish church. Of course, they thought I was some kind of a nut case. I would later learn to my embarrassment that San Buenaventura was Franciscan rebels can parish was run by Augustinians.

So I then went to the biggest bookstore in Madrid. Again my sanity was questioned. What was did you say? (Ci!!! Couldn't I instead you to something a bit more current?

In that was it. I turned to an expert in the matter, my aunt there Barangay. If there was anyone who could find that book, she could. She began by calling—of course—one friend (or an another friend) in Madrid. Here, who didn't I think of Dad?

Unfortunately, the woman she got hold of probably just had an unproductive month and, therefore, in a helpful mood. This time, she missed my eyes by telling her to call Ella in Barcelona in Catalonia in Northern Spain.

I would have given up at that point simply because the names I was going to be working with (and for too many letter Js? But not my aunt.

A wonderful man by the name of Pedro Aragon in Mila Asunción said he could only help by giving the number of a lady named Mayten, who lived in San Sebastian. I do not understand this part of the story. Perhaps Mayten was one of the founders of www.asunción.com.

At any rate she told my aunt (I had already fled by that time and my mind was on her cause) that what she was looking for was the Archivo de los Indios, which had just been transferred to Calle Buenos Aires 24 metro—Atocha!!

When my aunt finally made it to the Archivo, she was met by Padres Pedro (also, it turns out, had just come back from doing research in—can you believe it—San Antonio in Mikahil! He had brought out a copy of my dictionary—of long lost!

So was it worth it?

In the introductory essay of the new edition, there is mention of how the scholar William Henry Scott explains the value of the most wonderful words in the dictionary. He explains that one can gain an idea of the various terms the complexity of technologies already in use by the ancient Filipinos even before they were exposed to Spanish culture.

Scott discusses the expertise of our ancestors in such fields as agriculture, metallurgy, sericulture, architecture and the like as evidenced by their wide vocabulary.

Somehow it is so comforting, when you open the pages, to see familiar words like bahay, bukid and camarin. It is nice to know that 400 years ago, our grandparents spoke the same language.

Thinking back on Pila and its plaza and the issues that Cora and her friends must contend, by address, one begins to understand that heritage is many things. It involves buildings, and materials, artistic bend, books and plazas.

But it is also the work we do. The words we use, the feelings we express and we, the ideas that we cherish.

E-mail: [illegible]

Aging on the lap of history

The historic town of Majayjay, Laguna, celebrates its 433rd anniversary

By Pelele B. Tirazona
Contributor

An old adage that says "Looking back at the past paves the way to a bright future" goes for the people of Majayjay, Laguna, who never fail to remember their history.

Recently delegations from the town's 30 barangays, public school teachers, students, senior citizens and civic groups gathered at the town plaza and formed a parade about 2 km long in celebration of the town's 433rd founding anniversary.

The colorful parade showcased the costumes of varying designs worn by the participants, including vintage attires worn by the town's first municipal councilors.

After the two-hour parade, the town plaza hosted a program of speeches, folk dances and singing, and general merriment. Clusters of [illegible] dished fare, courtesy of town people who owned orchards of the fruit.

Rep. Teodo Aguinaldo of the 4th District of Laguna, the only invited guest, graced the occasion and commended the town and its mayor, Tino Bonifacio.

After the program, the crowd, led by Vice Mayor Felix Ibarra, moved to all-night feasts around the fire-engine circle, where food was served. Gambang, the town's signature wine

WOMENFOLK in gowns of pandan cloth

product, overflowed in coconut jugs and bird adobo chickens were consumed by the revelers.

The town of Majayjay inhabited by such a convivial but peaceful people is a historic place. Before it was a town, it was a thriving barrio as part of the Mt. Banahaw jungle.

Tala is the advent of Spanish rule. Spanish missionaries were sent to Majayjay to convert the natives into Christians. The town was formally founded in 1571, with Don Gaspar Ortiz as the first gobernadorcillo.

The name Majayjay was originally spelled as Tagpil as in Hindi-dios, roughly translated as "Tall of right." It was a reference to the steep uphill trails that made trekking to the town difficult for visitors.

Spanish-era monuments still stand in the town. One of them is the 271-year-old St. Gregory De Pil Church, completed only after 15 years of hard labor. Today, the church remains the social and spiritual center of the town of Majayjay.

THE 271-YEAR-OLD St. Gregory Parish Church

FOOD displayed in Barangay Pangil

LIFESTYLE

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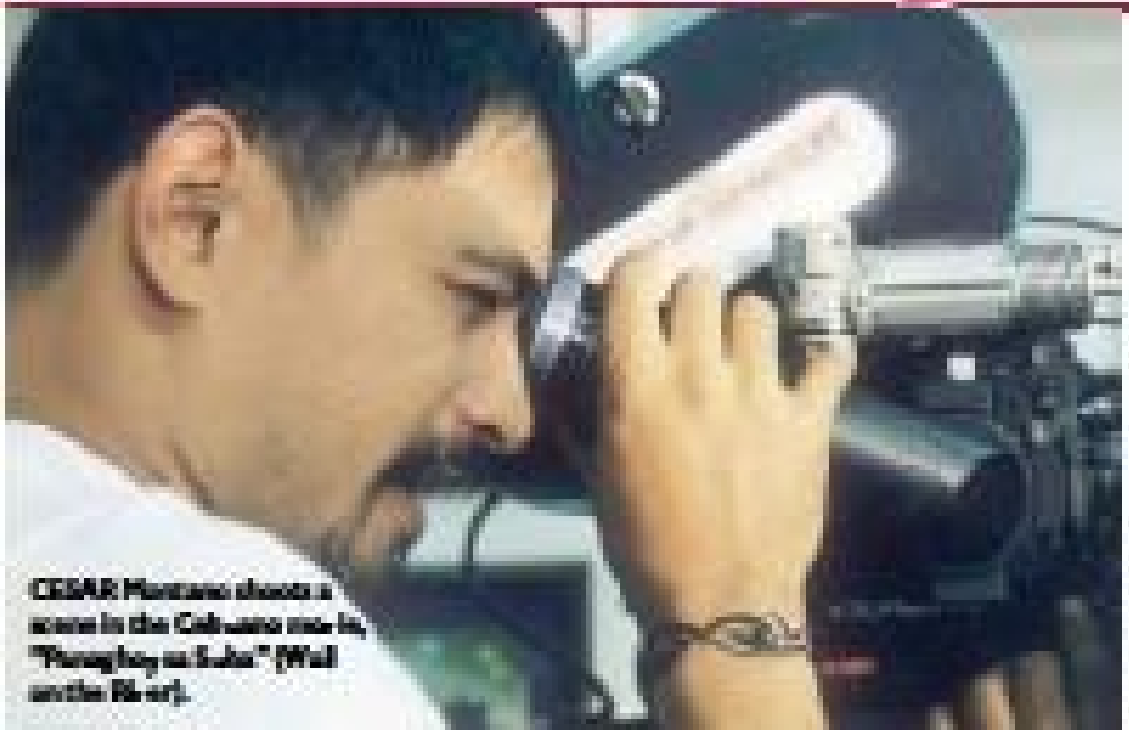
2337 (Globe) or 333 (Smart)



CESAR Montano shoots a scene in the Cebuano movie, "Panaghoy sa Suba" (Wail on the River).

Artists go natural

By Pablo A. Tariman
Contributor

RECENTLY media showed grim and shocking images of nature taking its revenge—massive landslides and rivers gone wild.

The number of typhoon fatalities alone makes you want to climb to Mt. Everest or Mount's Sagrado for solace.

Last year, Cecile Guidote and son Chavit, with filmmaker Marilou Diaz-Abaya, had one of their most unforgettable experiences—trapped by a rampaging landslide in Benguet after an outreach concert in Cagayan.

The road was blocked by large boulders. As we negotiated more

A STORY IS

MONTANO shows Daria Ramirez in the haunting funeral scene of "Panaghoy Sa Suba".

MONTANO stars opposite Juliana Palermo

Artists go natural

From page C2

than two kilometers to get to the open part of the road, I hastily called from 66 Aurora for help.

Lizzol had an early morning flight to New York the next day for a recital.

An hour later, a helicopter arrived at the city hospital to get Lizzol's son marked his 14th birthday riding a rescue helicopter from Wawa Dilaya to Manila.

Instead, Nature's fury does not spare anyone.

That is why Odette Alumnata has worked to raise the public's consciousness about the need to preserve the environment. She hosts home concerts, mobilizes the arts sector, and has lectured for free for the environment.

Lizzol played Schumann's "Widmung" in one of the people's gatherings. What a heartwarming occurred in the middle of the piece, columnist Conrad de Quiros said. So saw a glimpse of heaven.

Tribute to nature

One of the films in the forthcoming Metro Manila Film Festival pays a haunting and deeply lyrical tribute to Mother Nature. Cesar Montano's "Panaghoy sa Suba" (Wail on the River) shows how life in a village is protected by a river that becomes a living witness to transitions in the community's life—before, during and after the war.

This is a quiet but powerful film featuring Rebolf's well-planned environment. That a popular actor would take up the cudgels for the environment speaks well of Montano, who has received one of the highest awards given to a Bulakeño by his province's local government.

He shared the award with the famous Lubao Children's Choir.

"Panaghoy" stars Eliezel Along Lubao Riner Jochico of the same name. For the film's musical scoring, Nonong Buencamino (he did the superb musical scoring for "Sana Pasko," "Sa Pusod ng Dagat," "Mano dare" and "Dayang Dusmal") features the Lubao Children's Choir in one of the highlights.

Among the most riveting sequences of the film are the funeral (of a village played by Daria Ramirez) by the river; Montano making love to a village maiden (Juliana Palermo) on a boat by the river, and surrounding Japanese soldiers entering the river at the start of the Occupation.

In this film, Montano depicts a village where inhabitants are at peace with nature.

It would be dreadful if people also forget to care for this river and the horrible images of Juliana and Real in Quezon province are repeated.

For its beautiful tribute to Mother Earth, "Panaghoy sa Suba" should be cited by the Sentro for the Environment as Best Film of the Year.

Here and There

Oliver Zaldarga, two-time Don prize winner in the National Musicol Competition for Young Artists, again won the annual concerto competition at Lynn University in Florida. He played piccolo, violincia, cellists and other instrumentalists. His winning piece was Gaul's Flute Concerto No. 2.

Last year, he was the top choice among pianists who played Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 but lost in a rendered.

A member of the jury from Miami said it was the first time she heard a major talent in that area. She even asked Zaldarga to transfer to the University of Miami. Last September, Lizzol offered to coach Zaldarga for free for three weeks.

The final secondary (this is an understatement) of the Carlos P. Romulo Hall of PCEC did not do justice to Petite del Rosario Villanueva's playing of Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) under the baton of violinist Rene Pacgaff.

How she was able to focus without a decent sound from the orchestra was a big wonder. An MPO musician said playing in that hall was sheer torture. The hall is usually pleasing but a nightmare acoustically.

CANDAO Sanchez in a scene from a production

CECILE Lizzol with son Charlie in a vacation landslide in Bonsai last year

Glow-in-the-dark works on display

VICTOR Bella is holding his exhibit, solo art exhibit at MC Home Depot at 32nd St. and Bonifacio Blvd., near The Fort.

The exhibit features glow-in-the-dark acrylic glass paintings, flower stone sculptures, and mosaic-crystal sculptures.

The artist often feels glow-in-the-dark and uses glow-at-night decorating and painting outlines for glass windows, panels, and walls. The artist uses glow in the dark stone to produce this new artistic look.

The exhibit runs until Dec. 22.

Bella is a graduate of Fine Arts from Mapúa Institute of Technology in the Philippines.

Viewing hours at Home Depot are 1-7 p.m. Bella's glow-in-the-dark flower stone is also on display in Heritage Gallery at 506 Magsaysay.

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One of the products is the Guitar Starter Pack, which costs P6,500. It contains an electric guitar, an amplifier with 27 different sounds and accessories such as bell, carrying bag, cables and song book.

Founded by Uli Behringer in 1989, Behringer develops and manufactures technologically advanced products with exceptional value. Today, Behringer is a worldwide market leader and one of the fastest growing audio companies. The Behringer Group of Companies distributes its products in over 120 countries. It ranks No. 13 among the largest pro audio companies in the world.

Uli Behringer has changed the pro audio industry. In the early '90s he recognized the risks and need to "play global" by designing products in Germany while moving the sourcing and manufacturing unit to China.

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Behringer was introduced to the world of music and electronics in his very early years. He later mastered a Master's degree in Sound Engineering and is a classically trained pianist with a passion for jazz.